

OLD CHRISTMAS

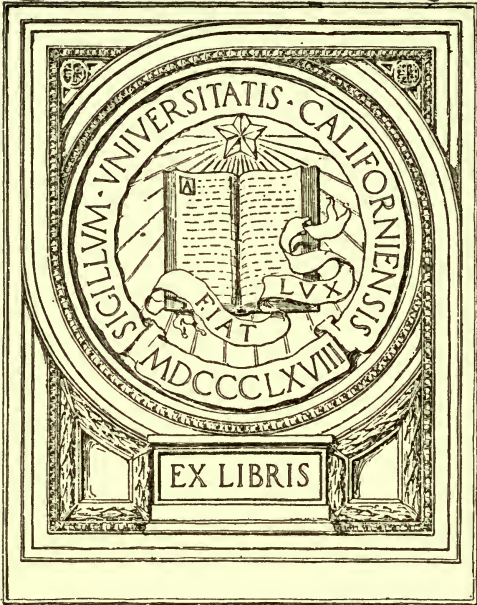
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WILLIAM ASPENWALL BRADLEY



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OLD CHRISTMAS AND OTHER KENTUCKY
TALES.

FRENCH ETCHERS OF THE SECOND EM-
PIRE. Illustrated.

OLD CHRISTMAS
and
Other Kentucky Tales in Verse

Old Christmas

AND

Other Kentucky Tales
in Verse

BY

WILLIAM ASPENWALL BRADLEY



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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DEDICATED
(WITHOUT PERMISSION)
TO
THE MOUNTAIN ANGEL
AND
LITTLE LEATHERWOOD

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PREFACE

THE following poems are the fruit of a visit made some four years ago to the Kentucky Cumberlands and other parts of the Southern Appalachian system. I had planned to spend a summer month or two in that remote region, which I had always wished to explore, and which had recently been rendered doubly attractive by reports of numbers of old English and Scottish ballads surviving there by oral tradition; but, having contracted "mountain fever," in the course of my travels on foot and on horseback, I remained nearly six months, or from about the first of June till before Christmas. How much further I should have prolonged what had already become largely a "technical" convalescence, I cannot say, if the rough little county seat, where I was then living, had not burned. Losing practically everything I had in the fire, I was forced to beat a retreat.

The length and the conditions of my stay in the hill country gave me an unusual opportunity to become acquainted with the life and character of the mountain people, about whom, perhaps, more has been written, and less actually known, than about any other on the continent. It used to be the theory of historians like John Fiske, that they are the descendants of Scotch-Irish settlers. More recently the view has been ad-

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vanced by Miss Ellen Churchill Semple and other Kentucky writers, that the Cumberland mountaineers, at least, are of English ancestry, and this view has been widely accepted, with the result that we hear much nowadays of "the purest Anglo-Saxon blood on earth" — whatever that may mean. To me it is clear that both strains mingle in Kentucky, with a large infusion of other elements, mainly French and German.

There is also a considerable trace of the aboriginal blood. The mountaineers have, in the past, been rather sensitive on this subject, and inclined to resent any reference to it. To-day, however, they are beginning to change their attitude somewhat, and I have told elsewhere of meeting an educated young mountain woman who proudly boasted that she was descended from the local Cherokee chieftain Red-bird. This did not mean that she was brought up any the less on the ancient ballads of Europe. She had invested in a set of Dr. Eliot's "Five-Foot Book-Shelf," and she described her surprise when she discovered that the "song-ballets" she had sung as a child, were "real literature." It was something like M. Jourdain's feeling when he found he had been talking "prose" all his life without knowing it.

The speech of the Southern highlander is rich in archaic survivals, and interesting lists have been made of words current in the age of Elizabeth, but since become obsolete. Moreover, this speech has, to an extraordinary degree, retained its pristine fresh-

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ness and plasticity. Owing largely to the widespread illiteracy, it has undergone little of the degradation that more than one writer, like Mr. George Moore, has noted in modern literary English, and it is singularly free from those pale, stereotyped expressions which are the result of newspaper reading. Living in the closest physical contact with nature, under conditions still largely those of pioneer life, and thus interested in things rather than in ideas, the mountaineer expresses himself racily, with simple force and directness; and, since his vocabulary is necessarily limited, he makes habitual use of metaphor and other figures. Those who have never heard him, especially under stress of emotion, — for the most part sternly repressed, — will doubtless be inclined to question the poetic manner in which I have occasionally made my narrators speak. But I can assure them, from long experience, that there is no exaggeration and that, if I have failed, it is in giving any adequate idea of the *beauty* of that spoken poetry one hears everywhere in the Cumberlands — particularly among the old men and women, and the children.

The reader will observe that I have not attempted to render with any literalness the mere *dialect* of the mountain people. I have sought simply to suggest it, and to keep the idiom. For the sake of color and appropriateness I have occasionally made use of local words, or of common words in their local uses, and a few of these will perhaps require elucidation.

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Thus "infare" is the name given to the bridegroom's "frolic" which follows the wedding, and to which the bride rides on horseback seated behind her husband. The wedding attendants are termed "waiters" and "waitresses." "Wait" has also many other uses, including attendance on the sick. The word "flower-pot" is applied to a bouquet of cut flowers. What is called "laurel" in the mountains is really our rhododendron, while our laurel (*Kalmia*) is designated "ivy." All other flowers are referred to indiscriminately as "lilies." "Clever," of course, has the meaning more or less common in the South, of friendly, hospitable. "Old Christmas" occurs on the 6th of January as it did in England before the change in the calendar in the eighteenth century, and as it still does in lands spiritually controlled by the Greek Church.

The name of one of my heroines — "Lake Erie" — will also need explanation. In the War of 1812 a large contingent of Kentucky sharpshooters were sent to the Canadian frontier, where they did so well in the battle of the Thames that Commodore Perry placed several companies in the fighting tops of his ships on Lake Erie. The State was so proud of their naval exploit that it named Perry County after their commander, calling the county seat Hazard; and "Lake Erie" — "Lake" for short — remains to-day a favorite name for girls in that section, though its origin has been largely forgotten.

A word as to "Saul of the Mountains." This is

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by no means merely a manufactured Bible parallel. I knew both "Saul" and "David," and visited the latter on his "sang" (ginseng) farm in one of the most remote corners of the Cumberlands, where he told me the incident on which the tale is based. "David" was — still is, no doubt — the champion player of the mountain dulcimer, or "dulcimore." There are several types of this singular instrument, for which no one has yet been able to suggest a satisfactory origin, and which has, of late years, been largely superseded by fiddle and banjo. That most commonly encountered is an oblong box of black walnut, shaped somewhat like a fiddle, though longer and narrower, and with a much shorter neck. It is strung with three strings — usually of wire — two of which are tuned in unison, the third a fifth lower. The player holds the instrument in his lap, forming the notes with a bit of reed which he slides up and down the nearest treble string with his left hand, while swiftly sweeping all three with a quill or piece of leather held in his right. The effect is similar to that produced by the drone-pipe of the bag-pipes — *bourdonnement* — and, in its remote, melancholy, monotonous tone, is admirably adapted to the mournful, somewhat minor music of the ballads.

These are by no means exclusively traditional. The mountaineer continues to compose ballads more or less, we may suppose, in the old manner, on local events that stir his somewhat sanguinary imagina-

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tion. Thus a whole literature has grown up about incidents of the Civil War in the mountains, and about the great feuds which, following it, to a certain extent grew out of it, and are also called "wars." Two familiar examples are the ballads describing "The Assassination of J. B. Marcum" and "The Rowan County Trouble."

Finally, a word to my mountain friends who, in one way or another, have contributed so much of the material for this volume. The stories which I have attempted to tell are in no sense offered as generally representative of mountain life. They are merely such as have attracted me because of their human appeal, or of their picturesque possibilities, and whatever significance they may have is rather artistic than social. Most of them could be transplanted from the mountains to other parts of the world without loss of essential truth, just as, in one instance, I have actually transferred a story to the mountains, from a far-distant corner of the country. All I have tried to do is to invest each story, as I have told it, with as much as possible of the peculiar color and atmosphere of mountain life, and to make it a means of interpreting the *spirit* of that life to the country at large, which has need of what the mountaineer — still intact in all his vital and spiritual energy — has to offer it.

W. A. B.

BOSTON MASSACHUSETTS

10 May 1917

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THE MOUNTAIN ANGEL

WHEN I go back to Carson town,
Shall I not see your striped gown,
Your snowy kerchief, and your crown

Of chestnut hair, just tinged with gray,
Or were it not more true to say,
With Time's dull silver dust *poudré*?

So strange, in that dark valley there,
I should have found in you an air
Of "*belle marquise*," highborn "*bergère*."

At Trianon you might have been
The play-companion of the queen
Who bared unto the guillotine

Her neck no whit more soft and white
Than yours the stolen necklace might
Have ringed no less with lustral light.

Your only jewels pearls of praise
From simple lips, your diamonds days
Of noble doing, helpful ways.

For you, within those hills' dark ring,
Summer and winter, fall and spring,
Did move, an angel-minist'ring.

THE MOUNTAIN ANGEL

“The mountain angel” — such the name
Men called you by, when first you came,
Who more their savage pride could tame

Than all the others; for you brought
No wounding word, no alien thought,
But with such deep clairvoyance wrought,

Of that strange, wayward, mountain heart,
Your miracles of healing art,
Resentment, fear, could find no start.

When I go back to Quarrelsome,
Leaving the city's stir and hum,
Shall I not see you smiling come

To meet me at the cabin door,
With children round you, as before?
And shall I see you never more

In evening light, at break of day,
Set forth upon your sturdy bay,
To tend your sick along the way?

You, at the forks, shall I not see?
Then let the little town for me
Remain a haunt of memory.

Let the steep street, the singing stream,
The cavalcade, the rumbling team,
Stay in my mind, with you, a dream.

OLD CHRISTMAS

*“ When Joseph was an old man,
An old man was he,
He married Virgin Mary,
The Queen o’ Galilee.”*

“THEY ’s heaps o’ folks here still believe
On Christmas — that ’s *Old* Christmas — Eve,
The elders bloom upon the ground,
And critters low and kneel around
In every stall, though none I know
Has seen them kneel, or heard them low,
Unless, maybe, ’t was Judith Daughn,
And she ’s been dead these years ago.
But, as a girl, I ’member well
How, sitting at her loom, she ’d tell
Of a strange thing that once befell,
When she lived here upon this creek
With Jason. I ’ve heard old folks speak
Of their log-house, when it was new.
All kinds of colored lilies grew,
On bushes, to the very door ;
And Jason laid a puncheon floor,
And framed a table and a bed
For Judith. They had just been wed,
When they came here from mouth o’ Ball.
Judith, you see, she was a Hall,
And all her folks was mighty sore
When she took up with Jason ; for

OLD CHRISTMAS

They long had been a row between
The Daughns and Halls. The Daughns was
mean.

Jim Daughn, he killed Dalt Hall, and then
Dalt's brother got one of *their* men.
And so, for years, the fighting went,
With every sort o' devilment,
Till Jason saw Judith one fall day.

“He 'd ridden up the creek a way
To where, beyond a beechen wood,
Hunt Hall's big double log-house stood,
Screened by some pawpaws turning red.
Then, as he turned his horse's head
Towards home, he stopped. There in the bed
Of the bright creek, he saw a sight —
A slim young thing pressed out the white
Sheep's wool, with whiter, glancing feet,
And, with her hands, held up the neat
Dark linsey skirt, so as to show
The gay red petticoat below.
She did not see him, and he drew
Back in the bushes, lest his view
Should startle her, so shy she seemed.
He closed his eyes, half thought he dreamed.
But, when he opened them once more,
He saw her standing, as before,
In her brown basket, and her feet
Moved on to some still music's beat.

“'T was Judith. Soon he learned her name,
And soon a chance to meet her came.

OLD CHRISTMAS

Then love, for both, sprang swift and sweet—
The sweeter, that they had to meet
In secret on the mountain-side,
Till one o' Judith's brothers spied
Upon them. Then her father swore
That she should never dark his door
Again, if she saw Jason. So
The lovers fixed it up to go
Away one night, and straight came here,
Where they grew fonder every year—
Most like young lovers, you would say.
Folks hereabouts admired the way
Jason would fetch and haul for Jude,
Draw water, cut and stack the wood,
Fix fires, call, feed, and milk the cows,
Do women's work about the house.
For she was weak-like, but would go
Along behind him with her hoe
All summer. For she loved to feel
The hot earth crumble 'neath her heel.
And she could sew, and tread the loom.
Jason had built her in the room.
There she would sit—I see her yet—
Weaving a woolen coverlet,
Day after winter day, till night.
'Log Cabin' was her favorite,
Unless 't was 'Star o' Bethlehem.'
For years she'd studied over them
Strange words, she said. For, stranger, then
They was no foreign preacher-men

OLD CHRISTMAS

Came to these mountains. She 'd not heard
O' Bible stories ary word,
And though she 'd learned The 'Cherry Tree'
A-setting on her mammy's knee,
She 'd no idea what them words mean
'Bout Virgin Mary being Queen
O' Galilee, and babies born
In some strange way, on Christmas morn. . . .

“For Christmas, then, was but a day
When boys and gals grew rude and gay,
And men and women drank their store
O' licker, played the dulcimore,
And danced, and sang, and shot some, too.
It was a mighty feisty crew
Lived on the creek in them old days.
But Judith and Jason scorned such ways.
Quiet and peaceful-like they went
About their work, and was content —
Or would have been, but for one thing.
They warn't no child to play and sing
All day upon the puncheon floor.
At first they had not minded. For
They had enough o' work to do
To cook, hoe, spin, and keep them two.
They was right poor. But came a time
When Jason throve, and crops was prime,
And then they thought it would be sweet
To hear a baby's running feet
About the cabin; and soon Jude
Got studying, began to brood.

OLD CHRISTMAS

What would she do when she was old,
With no young hand her hand to hold,
And no young lips to teach to sing
'The Cherry Tree,' or anything
Her mother taught *her* on her knee?
Jason tried hard to set her free
From such sick fancies. Jason, too,
Wanted a child, but now he knew
'T was hopeless — they 'd been married years —
And thought it foolish to waste tears
On something that could never be.
He had *Jude* anyway. . . . But she
Listened unmoved to all he said.
A hunger grew in her, a dread,
Until the thought became a craze,
And she would sit for days and days
Before the fire; and then, that spring,
When the leaves came, the poor cracked thing
Took to a sort o' wandering
Along the creek.

“As the earth stirred
With sweet new life, in bud and bird,
In orchards bowering each abode
She passed upon the rude creek road,
With pink-tipped laurel drifted high,
Something within her, strange and shy,
Seemed also stirring with new life.
She was no more a childless wife,
But *mother*. Then, when summer came,
Scaring the hillsides with fierce flame,

OLD CHRISTMAS

About her neck, sun-browned and bare,
She felt a baby's arms cling there.
But, with the autumn days, when all
The fading leaves began to fall,
And dull skies, like a leaden pall,
Closed down upon the creek again,
She knew the same dull ache and pain.
And times when mournful winds did blow,
She wandered restless to and fro
Like a lost leaf. And once she sought
A witch, who dwelt near by, and taught
Her magic charms to croon at night—
Strange charms that filled her with affright,
And made her sleep a troubled sleep.

“And now no more she called her sheep :
'Cunnana, sheep,' and held a gourd
Of salt, to draw the woolly horde
Down from the ridges to be shorn,
But roamed there with them, night and
morn,
Till winter, with sharp cold, set in.
Then, when the first frost formed a thin
Black film of ice upon the creek,
She felt herself grow dull and weak,
And had no more desire to roam.
When Jason left her there at home,
She'd try to weave, but soon would tire,
And, sitting, hands folded, by the fire,
Would dream, though she remembered naught,
When he returned, of all she'd thought

OLD CHRISTMAS

Through those long hours, and he could stir
No spark of love or life in her
Whom once his kiss, or least caress,
Thrilled through and through with tenderness.

“ Now she no more would share his bed.
A curse was on them both, she said,
And he was often filled with dread
Of what the future held in store,
When far away. For more and more
His business made him ride abroad,
And he'd increased their little hoard
By many a lucky timber trade ;
Yet could not see that wealth had made
Them any gayer. He grew sad,
And would have given all they had
To be again poor lass, poor lad,
But loving, and with no dark screen
Such as had lately grown between
Their lives.

“ It chanced he had to leave
Judith alone on Christmas Eve.
You see, like I explained before,
Christmas, to them two, meant no more
Than any other, *common* day.
So, when she saw him ride away
Upon his high, broad-chested roan,
It was not strange to be alone
That day of all. The hours had flown
Fast as the soft flakes fell to hide
The cliffs across the creek outside,

OLD CHRISTMAS

Till came a wind, snow turned to hail,
And smote the log roof like a flail.

“Before she knew it, it was dark.
She might have slept a little. Hark!
Was it a knocking that she heard?
Judith, still drowsing, turned and stirred
In her low chair before the fire,
And listened. The wind had risen higher. . . .
Then that soft knocking came again.
'T was late — too late — for homeless men
To be abroad, and shelter claim. . . .
Then still again that *tap, tap*, came,
Heard now more clearly than before.
She started slowly towards the door,
Then stopped uncertain. Should she go
And open it? She did not know . . .
The mountain folks is clever, but,
When there's no men — keep the door
shut.

That's what us women aim to do ;
For there's a mighty reckless crew
On every creek. Some strangers, too,
Is powerful bad. 'T ain't safe nohow
To let them in. But Judith, now,
Was right compassionate, could bear
To let none stay in the black air,
When they was warmth and light within.
So, when she heard the knocks begin
Once more, she went and raised the bars,
Opened the door. She said the stars

OLD CHRISTMAS

Seemed to sing out, they was so bright.
They filled the dusky room with light.
They was no more o' hail and wind.
At first her blinking eyes could find
No folks outside. But then she knew
Right close beside her, they was two —
One, an old man, whose back was round,
And whose gray beard most swept the ground.
He was afoot, but led an ass,
And on its back there sat a lass —
Or woman. Jude could hardly tell
Which, she was bundled up so well,
With head bowed down upon her breast.
The old man said: 'May we find rest
And shelter here, for one short night?
We must be on our way ere light.'

“Then Judith offered them her bed.
The old man smiled, but shook his head,
And, for a second, his bright eye,
Beneath dark brows, held hers. 'Where lie
Your beasts, warm-bedded, on their straw,
We, too, must rest.' Then Judith saw
She could not hope to turn his mind,
So led them up the branch behind
The log-house, to the barn, where all
The critters was kept safe in stall,
Lifted the latch, and let them in,
Brought corn and fodder from the bin
To feed the ass, strewed roughness round
To make a bed upon the ground

OLD CHRISTMAS

For the two strangers, left them there,
And went back to her fire and chair.

“ She must have dozed like half the night,
But woke to see a dazzling light
That streamed down through the roof o’erhead.
Then something seemed to call, she said,
Like music sung far off, and sweet,
And something seemed to draw her feet
Back to the door. She flung it wide.
The glistening world gleamed white outside,
With starlight. They was even more
Stars than they had been before,
Set in the sky, from east to west.
But one outshone there all the rest,
Straight over the shed that sheltered them,
The strangers ‘ Star o’ Bethlehem !’
’T was a strange fancy in her head
That made her say them words. She sped
Back up the branch. ’T was light as day,
And, through the barn logs, chinked with
clay,
She saw another light within.
And then she heard the strangest din
O’ critters lowing, and she heard
A sweeter cry than any bird,
When calling to its mate, can sing.
She clutched her breast, half staggering
Upon the threshold.

“ What she saw,
When she had crossed it, on the straw,

OLD CHRISTMAS

For years she could not clearly say.
But then a preacher came one day,
When she was old. And, stranger, he
Sort o' stirred up her memory
With his old Bible stories, so
She saw the cows kneel in a row,
Around the bed. The old man slept
Beside the lass, who closely kept,
While lying on her side, to rest,
A newborn baby at her breast.

“But, even as Judith looked, the light
That bathed them both, became less bright.
Slowly their forms began to fade.
Then Judith gave one cry, and made
A quick step forward, reeled, and fell.
Next evening Jason found her.

“Well,
I reckon, stranger, that 's most all. . . .
Was Judith hurted by her fall?
No, that 's the *queerest* part. They say
That in the soundest sleep she lay,
While, as her breathing lips half smiled,
Her arms seemed clasped to keep a child.
And, from that day, she was content.
So maybe 't was a vision sent
By Him, Who sees things clear and plain,
To fill her heart, and ease her pain.”

WILL WARNER

(*Ballad for a Cumberland Broadside*)

SHOT in the back, in the courthouse square,
By a dog of a Darrell skulking there,
Will Warner staggered and clutched the air.

Clutched the air, and the world went black
For an age, it seemed, then the light came back,
And, as in a dream, he sought the shack.

Shot in the back, so the spine came through
With the spurting blood, as each foot he drew,
Will Warner was near to his death, he knew.

Near to his death, and his heart grew gray.
Each of his brothers had passed this way.
He had paid *their* score. Who now would pay?

Jeff, as he drank at a creekside spring,
Ned, at the plough, had felt the sting,
Cal, as he rode to his infaring.

But a death for a death the dogs had paid.
Three Darrells low in their graves were laid.
Must the fourth go ever unafraid?

WILL WARNER

Still as he pondered the unpaid score,
He saw his mother who stood in the door,
As she had stood there thrice before.

Somber and silent, no word she said,
But drew the covers down on the bed
That had held the living and held the dead.

No word she said, but on cat's feet crept
Through the firelit room where her watch she
 kept
O'er her baby, her least one, who woke and slept.

Woke, then slept but to wake again.
Slept with the weakness, woke with the pain,
And a bee that buzzed and boomed in his brain.

And only once from his lips came a cry.
"Aw, Will, quit that! If ye've got to die,
Die like a Warner!" with flashing eye

Flung his mother. Ere night she had laid him
 straight,
And all on her shoulders had borne his weight
Up the steep hillside, to the gravehouse gate.

She bore him up and she dug him deep,
And left him alone in the earth to sleep,
Then stumbled back to the shack — to weep.

SAUL OF THE MOUNTAINS

“ YES, man, ’t was like the tale you read
From that there Bible-book, which said
How Saul loved David, and did send
For him to come and be his friend;
How David played before the king
A dulcimore, or some such thing,
Till jealous-hearted Saul did fling
His javelin, to kill the lad,
And all the rest. Our Saul was bad
Just thataway. ’T is queer the name
O’ both them two should be the same
As your old Bible folks. Big Saul —
That’s how we always used to call
Saul Spencer, up on Abner’s Run,
Who had most land, and the best gun
In all these parts. I reckon none
Made no more corn, nor killed more men.
For he was *mean*. I know of ten
He ’counted for. He pined to fight,
When he got drunk. He drank a sight,
Though mostly he managed to keep sober
From May or June, down through October.
But when the crops was harvested,
And he ’d unhitched the old mule sled,
He ’d git a gallon, go to bed,

SAUL OF THE MOUNTAINS

And there he 'd lie, and drink and drink,
Till a queer notion made him think
He 'd like to hear some music ; for
Big Saul, he loved the dulcimore,
And them song-ballets you folks say
Was fetched from countries far away.
Then he 'd send Dice, his daughter, down
The branch, to fetch young David Brown,
Who was the head man on this creek,
To pick the strings, and make them speak.

“ You see, young David taught the school,
So he had heaps o' time to fool
With dulcimores. They say he made,
With his own hands, the one he played.
It was the prettiest instrument,
Of best black walnut, shaped and bent
So slick, and boxed so tight and true,
With little wires, and horse's glue,
That 't was no wonder it could sing.
You only had to *touch* the thing,
To hear it, like it had a soul,
Whisper so soft, through each heart-
hole.

But when young David cut his quill,
And tightened up the strings, until
They was in tune, then you 'd allow
A bird was shut inside, somehow,
Singing his heart out, fit to die.
And so Big Saul would lie and lie,
Half drunk, and listen, with his eye

SAUL OF THE MOUNTAINS

Fixed on young David, who set there ;
Beside the bed, on tilted chair,
And played ; and, if he stopped, Big
Saul

Would take another sup, and bawl
For him to sing and play some more.
'T was lucky David had a store
O' lonesome tunes, and fast ones, too.
'The Mary Golden Tree,' he knew,
'The Little Mohee,' and 'Jackaro,'
'Sourwood Mountain,' 'Rosin the Bow,'
How Barbary Allen killed her friend,
How Lawyer Marcum met his end,
And others, more than I could say,
If I stood talking here all day.
And, stranger, hit was sure a sight
On airth, to see them there all night.
For Saul made David sing and play
Sometimes till nearly break o' day.

“How was the way the row began?
Well, Saul, he was a widder-man.
When his poor wife, Melindy, died,
He buried her up there beside
Her babies. She 'd had one each year,
But found it powerful hard to rear
The puny things. Six died in all.
And so, when she went too, Big Saul
Had for the lot a funeral,
The feistiest ever on this fork.
Ten Babtist preachers came to talk—

SAUL OF THE MOUNTAINS

Two niggers — and there was a sight
O' folks who stayed and drank all night —
Some shooting, too, — one was hurt bad.
Young David then was but a lad,
But six feet in his socks he stood,
And he could drink and shoot as good
As any man. That was the way
Saul took to David. From that day
They was most brothers, like I said,
Till David kindly got ahead
O' Saul, with one o' Dallin's daughters,
Who lived across on Cutshin waters.

“She was a pretty little thing,
With lips like laurel in the spring,
With sparkling eyes, like some deep pool
Beneath a rock-house, clear and cool,
And softly curving cheeks, whose blush
Flamed like a winter hollybush.
And first she seemed to favor Saul,
For he was rich, and her folks all
Was poor as poor, and paid corn rent.
But one day, when he slicked and went
Over to Cutshin, there he found
Young David sort o' setting round,
As if he lived there, and Dal's Sue,
Pretty and pink, dressed up in blue,
Had hardly ary word to say
To him ; and, reg'lar, from that day,
When he rode up, he found Dave there,
And once he came upon the pair

SAUL OF THE MOUNTAINS

Hugging and kissing by the gate.
Then all Saul's loving turned to hate,
And when he sent for Dave to sing,
He lay there slyly fingering
The trigger of the gun he kept
In bed beside him, while he slept.
And when Dave came, he felt an itch
To give the plaguy thing a twitch,
And finish David there and then.
But soon the longing came again
For one more tune, and he would stay
His hand, to hear him sing and play,
Swearing each tune should be the last.
But, as young David swiftly passed
From tune to tune, Saul could not bring
Himself to draw and pull the thing.
And David, stopping for a breath,
Had no idea he 'd been near death.
And yet he was no fool. He knew
That Saul was sore because o' Sue,
That 't was the music held him fast,
And wondered how long the spell would last.
" So things went on all through the fall,
Till nearly Christmas. Folks saw Saul
Was getting meaner every day,
And counselled Dave to keep away.
But Dave just only kindly smiled.
He was right peaceful, though, when riled,
He never was afraid to fight.
So he just strapped his gun on tight

SAUL OF THE MOUNTAINS

Under his arm, and went next night
Saul sent for him, like times before.
But one night, when he 'd passed the door,
He saw that Saul was feeling *bad*.
He 'd drunk up all the stuff he 'd had
That morning from Bill Abner's still,
And David knew he aimed to kill
Him then, if he could find the will.
But David showed he did n't care,
Said, 'Howdy, Saul,' and took his chair,
Tuned up, and then, as Saul's hand crept
Along his side, Dave's fingers swept
The strings, and he began to sing.

“ It was a song about the spring,
How swift along the creek it came,
Licking the hillsides like a flame,
Starting each branch the drought had dried,
Till down the creek there swept a tide
That great trees on its bosom bore.
Then, touching more soft his dulcimore,
He sang of love, how it did start
Anew, each spring, in every heart,
And how, above all else, 't is sweet
For lovers in green groves to meet,
When trees with birds are twittering.

“ So, without stopping, Dave did sing
For most an hour, so loud and well
The music seemed to cast a spell
On Saul, whose hand no longer crept
To reach his gun. His eyes half slept,

SAUL OF THE MOUNTAINS

And, as he lay there, tranced and still,
Dave knew that he had lost the will,
Once more, to do him ary ill.

He smiled, sang on, and then he, too,
Forgot himself in dreams o' Sue.
So, as he sang o' love, and played,
It seemed as if with her he strayed
In the green grove, a-fire with spring,
And heard young birds twit-twittering.

“Then suddenly a string went snap!
The thing lay silent on his lap,
And he stopped singing. In his head
Something that dreamed, seemed snapped instead
Of on the dulcimore. Saul, too,
Felt the thing break. Swiftly he drew. . . .
The ball just missed Dave's breast to bore
Right through his darling dulcimore.

“I tell you, 't was a narrow squeak,
And David slipped out on the creek
Right smart, you bet ; for David saw
He had n't ary chance to draw.
Besides, he did n't want to fight
With Saul, his friend. But, from that night,
He went no more to sing for Saul,
Who still would send his Dice to call
For David, at the school, to play.
But David found a better way
To spend his nights. He married Sue.
And then Big Saul, he married, too, —
A widow, who turned out a shrew,

SAUL OF THE MOUNTAINS

Took all his money, stopped his drink.
After a while, she made him think
He 'd got religion. He joined the church,
Feeling as lonely as a perch
Left in some measly minnow pool,
And died, at last, kicked by his mule."

THE STRANGE WOMAN

“WHAT spell was on me when I wed
This brutal boy who seeks my bed
Only when drunk. His kiss — his *sight* —
I loathe. I shall kill him to-night,
If he comes back as last he came,
With bloodshot eyes, with face aflame,
Making foul jest of my hot shame,
To force what once I freely gave
Ere I became his cabin slave.

“Alas, I know only too well
What charm, what sortilege, what spell
Has driven me hopeless down to hell
In this rude cabin on the creek,
Where even the harsh women speak
With pity of the foreign fool
Who came to teach a mountain school,
And married one of their own men.
They know the breed. I did not — *then!*

“Yet he was a boy to take the breath
Of one who, lonely unto death,
Longing for love, no longer young,
Saw him that day when first he swung
Down the dull, dusty, straggling street
Of the mean mountain county seat,

THE STRANGE WOMAN

Riding alone, with reckless air,
Bold face, and brown, close-curling hair,
Loose-seated on his pacing mare.

“ And I, who but the common sort
Of men had known, that sold and bought
And went dull ways in a great town,
Watched him as if he wore a crown —
As if he were some paladin.
I reeled — all round me seemed to spin —
I felt my heart stop still within,
When he, close passing by, gave me
A glance of gay effrontery.

“ Of all that followed from that day
When first we met, what shall I say?
He was a boy, I growing old —
There, in few words, the whole is told.
And if he cared, or seemed to care,
’T was that I offered something rare
For him a mountain mother bare —
Among coarse mountain women grew —
I, who was strange and soft and new.

“ And I was happy then at first.
It seemed as if, to quench my thirst,
Lifelong, of love and tenderness,
I craved each minute his caress.
It was so very sweet to teach
Him gentler ways, a gentler speech.

THE STRANGE WOMAN

Apt pupil then he seemed, and I,
Too proud for pride, no longer shy,
Wax in his hands, could naught deny.

“ Even then I might have hoped to hold
Him, had I, weak, but been more bold,
Brazened it out, borne high the shame
That faced me when my baby came.
But when men’s talk attacked my name,
Each coarse taunt falling like a flail,
Something within me seemed to quail.
Fool-like, I begged to be his wife.
Sullen he yielded ; then this life

“ Began. I knew he drank before.
Now, on our wedding-day, he swore
He would be gone for seven days.
He went, came back with eyes aglaze,
Trembling, unstrung, his mind in maze,
His boy’s face bloated, dull and old.
He struck me, called me slut and scold.
When I — for still I loved him — tried
To stir some rag of love, of pride.

“ And still I might have tried, and borne,
For his child’s sake, his sneers, his scorn,
Had he been faithful ; but he spread,
Himself, the story how he sped
From creek to creek, from bed to bed.

THE STRANGE WOMAN

Then last he brought his harlot home,
And I fled from the house, to roam
All night, thin-clad, till sick and weak,
I sank, half-fainting, in the creek.

“That was the end; from that black night,
I’ve hated him, have loathed his sight,
Have lain for hours till, hearing him come,
I felt each sense grow sick and numb
From fear of his approach. God send
Me strength to-night to make an end
Of him — and me. Listen! — I hear
His horses’ footfalls ringing clear!
Each chamber’s filled! *Now* I’ve no fear! . . .”

LAKE ERIE'S DEMON LOVER

“ WHO was that feller we saw pass
A-traveling on a little ass,
With a tall hat and long-tail coat,
And a chin-whisker like a goat?
Why, that was old Doc Jimpson Stote,
Though mostly we call him Doctor Jim.
I reckoned every one knowed *him*.
For he's been doctoring folks round here,
I judge, right nigh on thirty year.
He studied down to Louisville.
But, stranger, if *I* was took ill,
I'd a darned sight rather trust my life
To Mis' Lake Erie — that's his wife,
Or was, until she up and quit.
Folks never blamed her here a bit.
For Jim, he is the *lowest* skunk,
Even for a doctor. Most is drunk —
A lazy, good-for-nothing lot.
But Jim is worse than any sot,
Though he's that too. Gals is *his* game —
Married or single — all 's the same
To Doctor Jim. He has a way.
He casts a spell on them, some say,
With charms and conjuring and sich,
And I suspicion he's a witch,

LAKE ERIE'S DEMON LOVER

More than a doctor. You hain't seen
His bee-gums painted red and green,
With stripes o' yellow, black, and blue —
All sorts o' fancy figgers, too,
Like in a witch-book once I had.
Folks here is mostly mighty bad
To hold to witches, high and low.
And Doctor Jim, he knows that 's so.
They 's heaps o' folks is half afraid
O' Jim, and that 's the game he 's played
When he 's set out to git a maid,
Who like as not has hated him.
But hate hain't never hindered Jim.
He seems to like them all the more
When they show spirit first, before
He kindly gits them in his toils.
You 've seen a sarpint set his coils
Around some little fluttering bird,
Stark mad with terror, and you 've heard
The frightened, twittering sound it makes.
Well, Doctor, he 's one o' them snakes,
And Lake, she was a bird like that.
I knowed her when she was a brat
In shifts that scarcely reached her
knees.

And she was pretty as you please,
Back in them days, and different, too,
From most the other gals that grew
Up hereabouts, and knowed no shame.
Folks said most like it was her name —

LAKE ERIE'S DEMON LOVER

Lake Erie. No, I don't know why
Cal called her that. But she was shy
And gentle-like, and warn't no fool.
She'd fixed her mind on going to school —
Not one o' them common, no-'count kind,
With no-'count teachers, you can find
On every creek, but that new sort
The fotcht-on women had just brought
To Carson, forks o' Quarrelsome.
Lake, she had seen the women come
Over, one summer, to our creek,
Had talked with them, had heard them speak
O' ways o' living, strange and new.
So she begged them to take her, too.
And them strange women, they liked Lake,
And they was mighty glad to take
Her back with them. She stayed two years
And got a heap o' new ideas
'Bout what is right and what is not —
Things us folks here had most forgot —
And 'bout the way to sew and cook,
And read things printed in a book.
She got a heap o' notions, too,
'Bout what a wishful gal can do
'Sides staying at home and gitting wed
To the first boy that turns her head,
Then spending all her life right here,
Bearing a baby every year,
Until she feeds and rears a score,
And never stirring from her door

LAKE ERIE'S DEMON LOVER

To go as far as Perkins' mill.
Them quiet gals oft has a will,
And Lake, she said she'd be a nurse.
Then Cal, he started in to curse
His daughter for a god-damned fool.
He went and yanked her out o' school
Spite all the women-folks could say.
They tried to spirit her away
To Lexington. But, when Cal saw
Their trick, he said he'd have the law
On them, and so they let her go.
You see, Cal thought 't was something low
To nurse. For nurses has the name
O' leading lives o' sin and shame
'Mong us folks here, and Cal, he swore,
Pine-blank, he'd never have a whore
Among *his* gals. And yet he gave
Each o' the rest to be a slave
To some dull, drunken, shiftless lout,
Who'd mostly beat his wife about.
One opened Sue's, Lake's sister's, head
Once, with an axe — left her half dead,
A-lying on the cabin floor,
Then went off with his paramour,
When Sue had tried to keep him home.
Mostly the others used to roam,
Leaving their women to chop and hoe,
While they from town to town would go,
And drink, and fight, and stay in jail.
No wonder Lake felt her heart fail

LAKE ERIE'S DEMON LOVER

With such a look o' life ahead.
She swore that she would never wed.
But 'bout that time the Doctor came.
Them days he did n't look the same
As he looks now ; but he was dressed
In them same clothes, and fancy vest,
And his long hair, which now is gray,
All black and slick with bear's grease lay
Down on his neck. He had dark eyes —
And used them, too. He wore gay ties
O' flaring red, with spots o' green.
Poor Lake thought she had never seen
A man as grand as him before —
Good, too. He talked about the *pore*,
How he had come up here to tend
The sick, and kindly be their friend ;
And when she said she 'd wish to nurse,
He told her straight she might do worse
Than stay right here, and help with him.
So often she rode round with Jim,
And sick folks, they all thought a sight
O' Lake. Her hand was sort o' light
Like feathers, old Aunt Hepsy said.
Then she could tidy up a bed,
And turn a pillow fresh and cool.
She made a feller feel a fool,
Sometimes, with all the things she 'd fix —
Flower-pots, and such-like fancy tricks.
And yet he liked it, and he 'd wonder
What would n't a feller give, by thunder,

LAKE ERIE'S DEMON LOVER

To have a gal like Lake, for life.
Some tried to git her for a wife,
After a nasty fever spell.
But mostly it wasn 't hard to tell
That she was dead in love with Jim.
You 'd see her dark eyes follow him —
For hers was dark, like his eyes, too —
About, whatever he would do
There by a body's bed. The blood
Colored her face, like a dark flood,
If he as much as looked at her.
And you could see her bosom stir,
If he against her chanced to press,
Or touched her hand, or brushed her dress.
And Jim, we saw he saw it, too.
We watched him close, for us folks knew
Some things 'bout Jim she did n't know.
Tales in the hills is kindly slow
At first, in gitting started round.
But 'peared they was a gal got drowned
Where Jim had doctored on Cutshin,
And it was said he 'd helped her in.
Might have been talk, but just the same
It sort o' got for Doc the name
O' killing gals, when all was over.
Soon he was called the 'Demon Lover,'
Like in that ballet women sing —
A ballet all about a king,
Who, in far countries, had a daughter.
Her lover pushed *her* in the water.

LAKE ERIE'S DEMON LOVER

And so, you see, there was *some* sense
In folkses' talk. And then Sal Spense
Came in and told us how she 'd found
A young dead baby on the ground
Up in the woods, near the old slide.
Now one o' Garvin's gals had died
Up there, in some mysterious way,
The week before, and none could say
What was the matter. Doctor might,
But Doctor kept his mouth shut tight.
You see, he knowed Mont Garvin well —
Had lived up there with him a spell.
They 'd had a quarrel, then, I hear.
Doc stayed away for most a year,
But went back up to tend the gal.
I recollect once meeting Cal —
Lake's paw — who said, as he went by
Mont's shack, he kindly cast an eye
About, and saw Doc loafing there
With Mont. They 'd made it up, for fair,
For both was drinking from one tin,
While that pore gal lay dead, within.

“That tale did Doc no good, you bet.
Folks said the kid was his, and yet
'T was hard to prove. Mont would n't speak.
So things stayed quiet on the creek,
And Doc rode round here, like before,
With Lake, who seemed to love him more
Than ever. If a body said
A thing 'gainst him, she 'd take his head

LAKE ERIE'S DEMON LOVER

Clean off. For she had plenty spunk.
But once Doc came to see her, drunk . . .
He talked . . . I reckon he told her all . . .
Then, when he saw her start to fall,
He caught her, flung her 'cross a bed. . . .
From that day, Lake's dark eyes looked dead.
She feared Doc, and she tried to hate
Him too, but reckon 't was too late. . . .
Something was broken in her, sure,
Or how could a gal like Lake endure
To touch or wed a man like Jim?
For, like you know, she married him,
And went up yon with him to live —
If you can call it life to give
Yourself to a low skunk like that.
Why did *he* marry *her*? The rat
Wanted a mouse to keep his hole.
He thought he had her, body and soul.
But that's where Doc made his mistake.
He could n't git the soul o' Lake,
Though he had bound her body fast.
I knowed her dullness could n't last
When, thinking that Lake had turned a fool,
He tried to use her for his tool
To lead on other gals to sin.
Then something seemed to wake within
Lake's breast, like what we'd knowed before.
She had three kids — looked for one more —
When she told Doc she was going to go.
He would n't believe her first, and so

LAKE ERIE'S DEMON LOVER

He only laughed and rode away.
But when he came again, next day,
He found that she had kept her word.
She'd left two kids, but taken the third —
She knew that soon they'd each have two —
And Doctor saw that she'd been through
His drugs and pills, and taken half.
This time he did n't hardly laugh,
But swore that he would bring her back.
He heard that she had taken a shack
Down near the mouth o' Rocky Cleft,
That furrin folks had built and left
For years. There she had brought her store. . . .
He found her standing in the door
With his best gun. . . . He'd missed that,
too.

It seemed he did n't like the view,
And so he kindly slunk away.
He hain't been back there since that day,
And when he meets her on the creek,
He rides right by, and does n't speak.
For Doc, he is a dirty sneak,
But he has sense to understand
When some one has the upper hand.
Lake has it now, and holds on tight.
She doctors — waits on folks a sight.
She never studied none, that's true,
But she'd soon learned all Doctor knew,
Which was n't much, perhaps, but, still,
He'd studied down to Louisville,

LAKE ERIE'S DEMON LOVER

And brags about the time he cut
A man, took out a piece o' gut.
But if I wanted to keep my life,
I would n't let Doc use no knife
On *me*; and, if I was took sick,
I'd send for Lake all-fired quick,
And let old Doc Jim ride his mule
To them his coat and hat can fool,
And his sly way o' looking wise,
With them big goggles on his eyes.
They's some that fears his witch-like ways,
Though not so many now these days.
And Doctor, he is gitting old.
They say, when he was young, he sold
His soul to Satan. Well, that's right.
I hope the Sarpint gits him tight
Some day. Gee-oh! There'll be a yell,
When he plumps down straight into hell!

THE BOY SPEAKS

“WELL, anyway, M'liss, now she's dead.
You take her feet, I'll take her head,
And fling her up there on that bed,
Till morning. This one here will do,
I reckon, to-night, for me and you.
Let's have some grub. You'll find enough
O' cold corn pone and other stuff
Out in the cookhouse. Well, I'm rid —
Step light there, or you'll wake the kid!

“They'll penitentiary me for this,
Or try to. But you saw her, M'liss —
You'll tell 'em how you saw her stand
There in the dog-run, gun in hand —
I wonder where she got that gun.
I never thought the bitch was one
To take a turn like that. I'd run
Her pretty hard. But she was mild —
Had n't more spirit nor a child.

“Yet she was bound to have her way.
She aimed to git me from that day
I caught and kissed her in the school.
A woman sure kin make a fool
Of any man, even when she's old.
Seemed like she had a strangle hold

THE BOY SPEAKS

On me, and would n't let me go.
I did n't want to, first, I know.
Her voice was kindly sweet and low,

“ And she could make a feller feel
All sort o' soft from head to heel,
When she just touched him with her hand.
I reckon you cain't understand.
For she warn't much like you and Nan.
And yet I 'd rather have you than
Her any day. 'T was just a man
She wanted — reckoned I would do
To make her have a kid or two.

“ Well, there 's the kid. Before it came
She talked so much o' sin and shame,
I married her to make her quit.
I told her, though, I 'd hold the bit
In my own teeth. She had a fit
Most every time I took a drink.
Them furrin women seem to think
A man cain't never take his dram.
Well, she 's gone now, at last, God damn

“ Her soul! She 's got me in a fix.
I wisht I 'd never knowed her tricks.
But that 's enough o' her to-night.
I 'd rather hug you, M'liss, a sight.
Come on to bed. Put out the light.

THE BOY SPEAKS

I reckon they 'll put me in the pen.
But they 'll soon get me out, and then
I 'll take you, git a school to teach —
Unless I have a call to preach.”

A MOUNTAIN FAUSTUS

“STRANGER, they say they’s books that tell
How some chap sold his soul to hell.
You’ve read them? What was the feller’s name?
Faust? Then I reckon ’t warn’t the same
As him that lived round here. I’m sartin
That feller called hisself Bill Martin —
Lived in a log-house on Lot’s Creek,
And I’ve heard heaps of old folks speak
O’ him — tell how, when young, he sold
His soul to Satan — not for gold —
Leastwise, he never got a cent.
Or, if he did, he must have spent
It years ago, for he was pore.
Folks kindly feared to pass his door,
When it was dark, and he set there,
Outside, in his white oak split chair.
He had a heap o’ fancy tricks
That warn’t in nature. He could fix,
In some strange way, a feller’s gun.
It seemed he only had to run
His finger down the bar’l, like this, ·
To make the best sharp-shooter miss
The target. He could double back
The best hound dogs upon their track.
And when Jake Sykes, who lived near here,
Went up the mountain, once, for deer,

A MOUNTAIN FAUSTUS

Bill told him, flat, he 'd have no luck.
'T warn't long before he saw a buck
Right in the midst of a whole herd.
Jake fired. The darned thing never stirred.
He took a second shot — a third.
It warn't no use. Each time he missed,
The critter only kindly hissed,
And when he 'd fired his lastest shot,
He saw it toss its head, and trot,
With all the herd, back up the trace.
Yet next day, in that very place,
When he 'd done all that Bill had bid —
Had taken nine nails from the lid
Of Jap Bayne's coffin, found the sign
Of the big buck, and placed the nine
Nails all along there, in a row —
He had n't hardly time to go
Behind a chestnut oak, before
He heard a mighty crash and roar,
And straight from the wood beyond they
 came
That daggone brute, with eyes aflame,
Like he was going to trample Jake
Who had n't ary chance to take
No aim, just raised his gun and fired.
The buck plunged on, and then expired
Plumb at his feet. Jake cut its throat,
Strung it, and started in to tote
The carcass down the mountain-side.
He skinned it, and he kept the hide.

A MOUNTAIN FAUSTUS

I saw it once among his pelts.

For weeks he lived on steaks and melts.

He 'd never tasted grub more sweet,

He said, than that there devil-meat.

“And so, I reckon, they hain't much
doubt

Bill sold his soul. And yet he mought

Have told the tale to serve his ends.

You see, Bill and Jake Sykes was friends

Before the war, on Abner's Creek.

But Bill, he always was a sneak,

And when, one winter, both the pair

Began to talk with Allafair,

And Bill soon saw she favored Jake,

Then he tried powerful hard to make

Some plan to git the gal away.

He studied on it night and day.

For Allafair, she was a prize —

Could cook the bestest 'tater pies,

Had smiling lips and laughing eyes,

Cheeks like two apples, round and red,

And ways that turned a feller's head,

And made his heart git up and prance,

If she as much as gave a glance

His way. So Bill, he searched his mind —

He had more wits than looks — to find

Some sneaking way to turn her heart.

He made up things, and tried to start

Some tale, so Allafair would think

Jake 'd kissed another gal, in drink.

A MOUNTAIN FAUSTUS

'T was hard, though, to throw off on him.
For Jake Sykes never was a limb,
Kept sober, though he ran a still.
So folks looked kindly wise, when Bill
Went round a-sowing Devil-seed.
And Allafair, she gave no heed
To things, but passed them on to Jake,
Who had a powerful mind to take
Bill out, some day, and tan his hide. . . .

“ Now Jake took up the Rebel side
When came the tidings o' the war
To these here hills. One day his paw,
While walking home from 'Possum Trot,
Met with some Home Guards. Like as
not

They 'd been a-drinking, for they shot
The old man, left him there to crawl
Back to Dan Smith's. He got the ball
Out of his foot, and lay in pain
For weeks. Before he walked again,
Some other bloody Home Guards came.
They made the old man tell his name,
And then they asked where he 'd been hit.
One slouched across to look at it.
' Daggone, that hain't no way to shoot,'
He said, then stooped, and, from his boot,
Pulled out his gun. ' Ole man,' he said,
' Next time, you say 't was in the head,'
And shot him there, as he lay flat.
Now when Jake Sykes got word o' that,

A MOUNTAIN FAUSTUS

He buckled on his gun, and swore
He 'd more than even up *that* score.
And so he did. Scarce a day passed
Without some bluecoat breathed his last,
For weeks. But then the country grew
Too hot to hold him, and he flew
Into the hills a while, to hide.
Allafair saw him nights. Bill spied
Upon the two. Then, one dark night,
He saw Jake reach and take the light
From Allafair, and lead her back,
Down the steep trace, to her paw's shack.
Bill figgered out Jake meant to stay
Inside all night, and git away
Before the dawn. He had him trapped!
He leaped on his bay mare, and clapped
His big wheel spur against her flank.
They nearly rolled down off the bank
Above the creek, by Cornett's store.
Bill jumped, and pounded at the door,
Woke all the fellers. Every one
Came out to meet him with his gun.
And so they went from place to place,
Till soon they had enough to face
An army, let alone one man. . . .
Then back up Abner's Creek they ran,
Spread out, and made a circle round
The log-house, on the open ground,
And two went up and called to Jake
To come. He came, and no mistake,

A MOUNTAIN FAUSTUS

Unbarred the door and flung it wide.
One second, and he was outside,
And most before the fellers knew,
He 'd given a leap, and gone clean through
The ring, a pistol in each fist.
They fired, but was too slow, and missed.
Up through the brush they heard him go,
Then turned and scattered home below,
A sorry, disappointed lot. . . .

Now Bill thought Jake would make it hot
For him, if he came back some day.
When the war stopped, he stayed away
Right smart. It must have been a year
'Fore he dared show his face round here.
But Jake, he 'd married Allafair.
He was right happy, did n't care
To fight no more. He 'd had his fill.
So when, one day, he met with Bill,
He just looked straight, and passed him by.
Then seemed like Bill would always try,
From that day forth, to meet with Jake,
Who 'd go his way, and would n't take
No notice of him any more,
Than if they 'd never met before.
Because he did n't want to fight,
He did n't have to be polite!
But Bill, he could n't understand,
Seemed like, was always there on hand,
Till Jake, at last, got pretty sick,
And wished the feller would n't stick

A MOUNTAIN FAUSTUS

So close, and studied how he 'd tell
Old Bill to git and go to hell,
Without its hurting him too bad. . . .

“ And then, one day, when Jake and Thad
Thought they would like a little fun,
And started out with dog and gun,
To cross the gap, they heard a noise.
Bill broke from the brush, said : ‘ Howdy, boys,
Reckon I ’ll go hunt along wi’ you.’
That made them both feel powerful blue.
They did n’t speak to Bill, or smile.
And so they went for most a mile,
Letting old Bill keep on ahead.
But pretty soon he stopped, and said :
‘ That a fair ’possum dog you got?’
Jake flared up like at that, got hot.
They warn’t no better dog to go
At coon or ’possum — told him so.
‘ Well, boys, bet I can make him miss.’
Bill gave a cur’ous little hiss
That brought the hound right to his side.
He passed his hand along its hide,
Then grinned at Jake, and said : ‘ You ’ll see
How he ’ll bark up an empty tree.’
Jake swore ’t was all a pack o’ lies.
But when they ’d reached a little rise,
Sudden the hound picked up the scent.
‘ Yip! Yip!’ and off he cut hellbent,
Leaving the fellers far behind.
Looked like that hound had lost his mind,

A MOUNTAIN FAUSTUS

The way he tore along the ground,
Making the most God-awful sound.
At last they found him dancing round,
Like mad, a little leafy beech.
They warn't no 'possum there in reach,
So Jake, he started, with his axe,
To chop it down. Took twenty whacks
To fell it, for 't was full o' sap.
That hound dog made straight for the
lap,
Then stood stock-still, in 'bout a minute.
Darned if they were a critter in it!
He whined, but not a feller spoke,
Till Bill, he said: 'Too bad my joke
Made you folks miss your 'possum meat.
But a good fat coon is just as sweet,
And I'll plumb take my oath and swear
We'll find a big one over there,
Yon side the gap, along a log!
Again he hissed, and called the dog.
And when once more he'd passed his hand,
That hound, he seemed to understand,
Lit out like lightning, led the way.
'T warnt long before they heard him bay
Like, sure enough, he'd found a coon.
'T was gitting dark now, but the moon
Came surging up above the gap,
And all the time that hound's yap! yap!
Kept growing louder and more near.
Yon side, the fields was mostly clear,

A MOUNTAIN FAUSTUS

But one big tree lay on the ground,
And there they saw that daggone hound
Leaping almost clean out his hide.
Back up against the trunk they spied
The biggest coon you ever saw.
It got that hound with tooth and claw,
When it closed in. It was a sight,
Jake said, to see them critters fight.
It took them nearly half the night
To make them loosen up their hold.
When it lay dead, Bill said: 'I told
You boys the truth, ain't that so,
Jake?'

Jake 'lowed it was, and no mistake,
And Thad, he 'lowed he'd like to know
The trick. Then Bill spoke kindly slow:
'Well, boys, I like you mighty well —
Want to be friends — so I will tell
You all I know. Them 's but a few
O' the strange things that you can do
If you will follow after me.'
He drew them both behind a tree,
And made his voice low-like and soft.
Jake said just then he looked aloft,
And saw the moon that seemed to reel
Behind wild clouds, and he could feel
Cold shivers through him, as Bill told
How all they had to do was mould
A silver bullet, take a gun,
Go up the gap, before the sun,

A MOUNTAIN FAUSTUS

Then, to the limb o' some dead tree,
Tie a red rag, and when they 'd see
The sun-ball shining through, take aim,
Cursing Jehovah's holy name,
And calling the Devil —— '

“ ‘Stop,’ cried Jake,

Who felt his innards sort o' quake,
'Stop there, you skunk, we 've heard enough
O' your blaspheming, heathen stuff.
Begone, now, or, by God, I 'll send
You straight to hell, to meet your friend,
Before he has a fire prepared
To warm your hide!' Bet Bill was scared,
All right. Leastwise, we never heard
He tried again to say that word
He did n't speak. So, till to-day,
They 's no one rightly knows the way
To sell his soul, if he 'd a mind.
And as for Bill, they say he jined
The Regulars, before the end.
And so he cheated his only friend,
When he died logging on the creek,
And got to heaven by a sneak!"

FULT FAITHORNE

WHEN Faithorne heard that his friend was dead,
He made no sound, no word he said,
But he clenched his fists, till the blood ran red.

Then he flung the saddle across his mare,
Rode down the creek to the village where
The Ernes and the Elys had their lair.

He saw, when he came to the village street,
A child that played in the dust and heat,
And he swung her up behind his seat.

“They can send me to hell, but they ’ll send her too!”
He dropped his rein, both his guns he drew,
And he held them cocked, as he rode straight through

The straggling street, in the locusts’ shade,
Where the court-day crowd a passage made,
And the women fled to their homes, afraid.

They fled to their homes and they drew inside
The children who clung to their skirts and cried,
To see Madge Erne with Fult Faithorne ride.

He rode till he came to the fork road turn,
But he saw no Ely and saw no Erne.
Then his right side felt a steel ball burn.

FULT FAITHORNE

He wheeled and he saw them, heard Frank Erne cry :
“My God! don't shoot, or the child will die!”
Saw him knock Cal Ely's muzzle high.

They broke and ran, but it was too late.
Fult shot down two at the Elys' gate.
Then he rode back home. He had cleaned the slate.

LITTLE LEATHERWOOD

“No, sir, they ain’t but few as good
Round here, as Little Leatherwood.
That ’s jest our name for lawyer Brown,
Who owns the store, an’ runs the town.
He put the county trouble down
Years back. The Trenches killed his paw,
An’ he tried hard to git the law
On them. But when they all came clear,
He stood his ground, an’ would n’t hear
O’ starting up the war again.
His folks was mad as hornets then,
Called him a coward, sneered, an’ cursed.
I reckon the women was the worst.
They always is, when they ’s a fight.
But Leatherwood, he had the right.
What these here mountains need is *peace*.
But how ’s the shooting going to cease
If no one ’s ready to begin?
Leatherwood brought round his kin
After a while, an’ now the clan
Worships him almost, to a man.
I might say to a woman, too.
You ’d ought to see his ole Aunt Sue
Act the young gal when he comes nigh,
Smooth out her dress an’ cock her eye.

LITTLE LEATHERWOOD

An' other folks ain't far behind.
I reckon, stranger, you won't find,
In the whole county, one 's his foe.
You see, we trust him, an' we know
He means jest what he says, pine-blank.
'T was he that started up the bank,
An' once, when Dawson Blaine got mad,
An' said he 'd take out all he had —
He was right rich an' had a lot —
To bust things up an' make 'em hot,
Leatherwood drew, then locked the door —
'T was at a meeting, — an' he swore
That Dawson should n't touch a cent.
An' then the time that Big Bill Blent,
Who 'd quit the army, started in
To shoot the town up, raised ole sin,
Leatherwood sent for him, said : ' Son,
I sort o' hate to spoil your fun,
But things is different here to-day,
Right smart, from when you went away.
We 're powerful glad to have you back,
But if I hear another crack
From that there gun o' yours, you 'll see
You 'll have to fight it out wi' me.'
Then Bill, he knowed he 'd have to quit.
For Leatherwood could toss an' hit
A silver coin up in the air,
Or kindly part a feller's hair,
Jest like his uncle Leatherwood.
I never rightly understood

LITTLE LEATHERWOOD

How was the way both them two came
To git that queer outlandish name ;
For common leatherwood, you see,
Is jest a sort o' hickory
That 's limber like from butt to tip.
Folks use it here to make a whip,
Or else a flail. The stuff won't break,
Bend it or bruise it. But, landsake,
Them two would break before they bent.
They say Big Leatherwood once went,
When he was sheriff, for a man.
First think he knowed, the whole blamed clan
Was buzzing round him on his track.
'T was night, an' 't was so powerful black,
He could n't hardly see a thing.
But he could hear the rifles ring,
An' every now an' then they came
A little spurting flash o' flame,
So he could give 'em shot for shot.
Say, boy, it must have been right hot
For Leatherwood, who stood his ground,
An', as the balls came whistling round,
He kindly smiled an' whistled too,
An' sang the only song he knew :

*' Oh, they hain't a bit o' use in whining,
Or asking the reason why.
Tomorrer the sun may be a-shining,
Though cloudy be the sky.'*

LITTLE LEATHERWOOD

"'T warn't long before he'd brought down one,
Then all the others broke an' run.
Next day he got his feller flat.
Now Little Leatherwood's like that,
An', stranger, 't ain't so very long,
Since we heard *him* sing that same song.

"'T was when the town burned down last year.
Happened he was away from here
That night, good twenty miles, on Clare.
He'd ridden over on his mare,
'The Brown Gal,' jest the day before,
To make a trade at Bartram's store,
Or might have been a different tale.
We saved the courthouse an' the jail,
But all the rest was swept away,
How the thing started, none can't say.
'T was late, an' folks was all abed.
The town was still, like it was dead,
When sudden came a fearful yell.
I jumped, looked out. Judge Mott's hotel
Was all one crackling sheet o' flame.
Soon Leavitt's stable was the same.
The hardest hearted would have cried
To hear them critters caught inside. . . .
We bust one door, let out a few,
Then looked to see what we could do
To stop the blaze a-spreading fast.
We got the buckets out an' passed
Them from the creek to those that stood
On roofs around, but 't warn't no good.

LITTLE LEATHERWOOD

Us folks missed Little Leatherwood
That night. His store was next to go,
'T was in the stylish new brick row
He 'd built that spring, all bright an' red.
He 'd fixed an office overhead,
With desks an' rugs an' heaps o' books.
I'll bet you could n't beat the looks
O' that there office anywhere. . . .
We saved a table an' a chair
An' some big books bound up in sheep.
They made a sorry-looking heap
Down in the street, all bent an' torn.
It sort o' made me feel forlorn
To see 'em, cause he cared heaps more
For books, than all was in his store.
It tickled him to have a lot.

“By now the fire had grown so hot
You could n't hardly stand the heat.
Sudden it jumped across the street
An' nearly cornered Uncle Bill,
Working like sin to save his 'grill'—
Sort of ice-cream saloon, you know.
Seemed like the wind came on to blow
Right smart, 'bout then. The blamed thing
leapt
Beyond an' empty space an' swept
From house to house, along the line.
It took 'em all. Yes, one was mine.
I lost nigh everything I had.
But other folks was jest as bad,

LITTLE LEATHERWOOD

An' Leatherwood was worst of all —
The highest has most way to fall.
He 'd built the bestest house in town,
All colored red an' blue an' brown,
With tin below to look like stone.
It stood up on the creek alone,
But sparks kept falling all around.
Soon it was smouldering on the ground,
An' Dally an' her kids, half dressed,
Roamed through the street with all the rest,
Or stood about the courthouse square.
I said we stopped the fire right there.
Tell you, though, boy, it was a fight.
The women slept in jail that night,
Where most had never slept before,
Or lay along the courtroom floor,
With all their children. But us men
Was glad to have the boardwalk when,
Plumb tuckered out, we 'd done our best.
We had n't much chance, though, to rest.
'T was close on morning, an' right soon
The dawn came up to dim the moon
An' stars that kept a-shining down
All night upon the burning town,
As if they did n't care a hang. . . .
I thought o' times I 'd gone for sang,
An' stayed out on the hills all night. . . .
Seemed like I 'd dreamed. But then the sight
Of all that smoking, smouldering stuff
Showed that the fire was true enough.

LITTLE LEATHERWOOD

All what was left was charred an' black.
They warn't but one small measly shack
Left standing here on Carson street.
A feller lived in it named Pete.
Now I'd missed Pete the night before,
An' when I seed him in the door
That morning, he looked kindly queer.
It 't warn't his moustache on his ear —
'T was jest two feet from tip to tip,
An' when it hung down from his lip,
Folks knowed that Pete had had his drink —
'T was more his *face* that made me think
To look again. When I came nigher,
He called out: 'Howdy! Been a fire,
I see. I reckon I must have slept
Straight through it all.' Well, I most leapt
Out o' my skin. To think that skunk
Had laid there sleeping in his bunk
An' never heard a blessed thing!
At first I had a mind to wring
His daggone neck, the low-down shirk,
Who'd let us fellers do the work,
While he slept peaceful all the night.
But then it gave me such a fright
To think the feller might have burned,
I could n't say a word, but turned
Away. Folks now was most awake,
An' walking round. 'T would make you ache
To see them searching so to find
Some things the flames had left behind.

LITTLE LEATHERWOOD

They wandered down along the creek,
Mostly was silent, *could n't* speak.
Growed men was not ashamed to cry.
I seed Judge Mott, who wiped his eye
Where once his ole hotel had stood.
I thought some more o' Leatherwood,—
Reckoned by now he must have heard.
We 'd sent a boy last night with word
Over to Bartram's store, on Clare.
'T warn't more 'n twenty miles from there,
But roads was bad, an' going slow.
When he 'd git back, we did n't know.
I kicked his law books where they lay,
An' almost wished he 'd stay away.
I did n't want to see his face.
You see, he 'd almost *made* this place,
An' planned to make it bigger still,
Like Lexington or Louisville.
Now all his work had gone for naught.
He 'd take it powerful hard, I thought.
An' yet we needed him a sight.
Some fellers started in to fight.
They 'd smuggled licker in somehow.
That helped right smart to stir the row.
Soon things was going straight to hell.
But then we heard a powerful yell.
'There 's Little Leatherwood,' folks cried.
An', sure enough, we seed him ride
Over the hill an' down the street.
'The Brown Gal 's' little twinkling feet

LITTLE LEATHERWOOD

Scarced hit the ground, she came so fast.
Then, when he 'd reached the crowd at last,
He drew up short, an' glanced around,
Cried: 'Howdy, boys!' jumped to the ground,
An' while folks made a sort o' ring,
Gol darn it, he began to sing:

*'Oh, they hain't a bit o' use in whining,
Or asking the reason why.
Tomorrer the sun may be a-shining,
Though cloudy be the sky.'*

“ Well, son, you should have seed the change
That there song made! It sure was strange.
’T was like a storm had cleared away.
Been no more fighting from that day
In Carson. Folks worked might an’ main
To build them back the town again,
An’ ten times better than before.
That ’s Leatherwood’s new cement store.
I reckon *hit* won’t never burn.
He’s got a bathtub where you turn
Two things to let the water through,
An’ everything like that that ’s new,
Up at his house. Hit ’s colored blue.
For Leatherwood, he ’lowed he ’d seen
Enough o’ houses painted green
Like trees, or brown, like earth. He ’d try
To make *his* look jest like the sky!”

YOUNG LEATHERWOOD'S DREAM

IN the cabin room, when the day had fled,
Young Leatherwood lay on his pallet-bed,
And a swarm of dreams came round his head.

A swarm of dreams, some dark, some bright,
Some of work, some of play, some of pistol fight,
But the dream that gave him his dear delight,

Was a dream that stayed as the others went:
He had ridden far, and his horse was spent,
When he came to a cabin of gay content.

The cabin stood on a little creek.
It was night, and he heard a fiddle squeak,
And a soft voice out of the darkness speak:

“Get down, Young Leatherwood, get you down.
Long have you wandered by creek and town.
Now enter and put on your silken gown.”

Young Leatherwood entered, in strange amaze,
No cabin room, but a hall ablaze
With cressets that blinded his wide-eyed gaze,

As, standing there in the open door,
He watched the dancers who shook the floor,
To the din of the fiddle and dulcimore.

YOUNG LEATHERWOOD'S DREAM

For never, I warrant, was such a sight
Seen in the mountains by any wight,
As Leatherwood saw in his dream that night.

Right there, in place of the rowdy rout
Of a mountain dance, with bully and lout,
Lords and ladies stepped boldly out.

Lord and lady and page and squire
Stepped boldly out in their brave attire,
That blazed and burned in the torches' fire.

And the silken banners that clove and clung
To their staves on the walls with dark damask hung,
Shivered and shook, as the dancers swung

In a surging flood, like a mighty tide,
Where the tallest trees from the mountain ride,
As it sweeps through the creek and the countryside.

Swung hither and thither on nimble feet,
Timing their step to the music's beat—
Leatherwood looked, till, more soft and sweet

Than a cardinal's cry, or a thrush's song,
Came the voice he had heard, from the circling
throng :

“Linger, Young Leatherwood, not too long.

“Your silken gown and your crown of state,
And your doeskin shoes for the dancing, wait.
So tire you soon, lest you be late.”

YOUNG LEATHERWOOD'S DREAM

Then a hand that he saw not, took his hand
And led him away from the bounding band,
To a little chamber at his command,

Where he stripped off his suit of the butternut brown,
And put on the shoes and the silken gown.
Then two hands placed on his brow a crown.

And as soon as the crown had touched his head,
He saw right well who his feet had led —
A damsell whose lips and whose cheeks were red,

Whose eyes were like stars, and whose braided hair
Shone like the corn, when the summer air
Ripples across it, bright and fair.

“ Now see, Young Leatherwood, will you see,
The maid who hath waited long for thee,
And who, this night, thy love shall be ? ”

Then she led Young Leatherwood back once more,
Where the feet of the dancers shook the floor,
And down through the press they boldly bore.

And I warrant Young Leatherwood's heart beat high
To feel her soft body against his thigh,
And to look on her snowy breast so nigh.

Then they passed through a door to a little cove,
Where the beech-trees stood in a circling grove,
And fair lovers walked and talked of their love.

YOUNG LEATHERWOOD'S DREAM

“ Young Leatherwood, Leatherwood, leal true heart,
I have waited long. Now naught must part — ”
Then Leatherwood woke in his bed with a start.

Woke with a start, yet still he seemed
To hold her as close as when he dreamed,
And his head with her lingering love-words teemed.

And all that day, as he held his hoe
On the steep hillside, and followed the row,
He felt through his body her warmth and glow.

And ever, for days, at his side there stood,
In the dim forest, or by the dark flood,
A shape that bewildered Young Leatherwood.

GAMBOLS ON GAYLY

“ How do I reckon our creek came,
In the old days, to git hit 's name?
Well, gals was always rude and gayly
Round here — still is. Now there 's Mahaly,
Shade's girl, as bad as most our boys
To have big times, and make a noise.
She kept things on the stir last year,
Though she 's some settled now, I hear,
Since her first baby came in May.
All gayly gals is caught that way
Sooner or later. Pretty, too,
With bright red hair, and eyes green blue,
Freckles, a nose turned up and pert.
And she was the very worstest flirt —
Kep' six young fellers on the string,
Not counting Hiram Pickering.
For Hi was kindly gitting old ;
But he kept store, had heaps o' gold,
Folks said, and when his third wife went,
He ordered a marble monument
From one o' them mail-order books.
You 've seen the darned thing, how hit looks
Up yon — an angel in a sheet,
With wings, but no shoes on hits feet,
Trying hit's best to fly away.
Hi had a Decoration Day

GAMBOLS ON GAYLY

When hit was placed there, for his wife,
And though he 'd hated her in life,
He took on bad to howl and cry . . .
So gals was glad to talk with Hi.
But first it seemed he did n't care
To talk with them. He 'd had his share,
He said, and shook his head, and when
Folks asked if he 'd hitch up again,
He said: 'No, sir,' that he was through.
But us who 'd knowed Hi long, we knew
Such feelings was n't going to last.
And sure enough, one month warn't passed
Before we used to see him daily
Ride down the creek to talk with Haly,
Dressed in store clothes, and, like as not,
He 'd have a fancy flowerpot
Picked fresh that morning. For Hi's first
Had favored flowers. He had cursed
Her then. But now they came in handy,
And he was mighty glad that Mandy
Had been a plaguy daggone fool
And learned strange tricks at Carson
School,
Over at forks o' Quarrelsome.

“Now, when Mahlay saw him come,
And knew at last he meant to talk,
She made them other fellers walk.
They was all powerful mad, but one—
Jerome, the widow Martin's son —
Took hit right hard. He got his gun

GAMBOLS ON GAYLY

And swore he 'd make old Hiram pay
For Haly sending *him* away.
He followed Hiram everywhere.
But Hi, to show he did n't care,
And was n't a mite afraid o' Rome,
Rode round and left his gun at home.
But once, when he came riding back,
And had most reached the storehouse shack,
He saw Rome standing on a clift
Above the creek, and saw him lift
His gun, squint down, take careful aim.
Then came a little spurt o' flame.
Ping! And the steel ball barely missed
Hi's heart to graze his lefthand wrist.
Hi wheeled his horse, clapped spurs, and then,
Over his shoulder : 'Shoot again!'
He shouted, and three times before
He 'd crossed the creek, and reached his door,
'Shoot! shoot again!' he turned and cried,
Then slipped from his saddle, ran inside,
Grabbed up *his* gun, and soon the creek
Heard Hi's old .30-.30 speak,
And Rome lit out then, mighty hot,
For Hi was reckoned a first-rate shot.

"There was n't much trouble after that,
'Cept what Hi had at home with Hat.
But there he had enough o' strife.
Hat, she was sister to Hi's wife,
Sallury. When Sallury went,
Hi studied awhile, and then he sent

GAMBOLS ON GAYLY

For Hat to come keep house for him.
She was past forty, gaunt and grim,
But she had been good-looking once
— Still was — and folks thought Hi a dunce
Not to go marry Hat instead
O' some young flighty emptyhead.
For Hat could cook, and she could spin.
She kept Hi's house neat as a pin,
Tended the store, and held a hoe.
Now Hat knew she would have to go
If Hi brought Haly home, and so
When talk began, she took on bad.
You see, 't was all the home she had,
And she 'd made up her mind to stay
Married or single . . . any way . . .
She did not say much, but her looks
Was black as ink in printed books.
And every time she served a meal
O' vittles, she made Hiram feel
She 'd crush Mahaly 'neath her heel,
If she could only git a chance . . .
But when Hi planned to give a dance
For Haly, trouble began to brew.
Hat sat up every night till two,
And drank. For Hat, she loved her dram.
Then she 'd be late, and Hi would damn
Her soul next morning from his room,
Or he 'd jump up and fetch a broom
And try to *poke* her out o' bed.
She plagued him, but he went ahead

GAMBOLS ON GAYLY

To have the dance that he 'd norated
At the last meeting. Hiram hated
To dance himself, but he would show
He was not yet too old and slow
To foot hit on the cabin floor.
And so he sent for Billy More,
The one-armed fiddler, who could play
Most without rest, all night and day,
Holding the bow between his knees,
And scraping, as easy as you please,
The strings across hit, and could sing,
Or blow on a mouth-organ thing,
Both at one time.

“ When the night came,
Hi saddled up his black mare, Mame,
Rode down the creek to Shade's old shack
To git Mahaly, brought her back
Seated behind him on the mare.
You would have laughed to see the pair —
Hiram so stiff in his boiled shirt,
Haly's bare feet beneath her skirt
O' turkey-red, a-dangling down,
A hat, with feathers from the town,
That sort o' slanted 'cross one eye.
With both her arms she held to Hi,
And on his shoulder leaned her head.
Then, when he 'd lifted her, and led
Black Mame back to the horses' shed,
He brought her in. The dance began.
I reckon they warn't no prouder man

GAMBOLS ON GAYLY

In all the world, than Hi that night.
Mahaly's little feet was light,
And she could cut the short dog fine
In 'Boxing the Gnats' and 'Hook and Line.'
Most every fancy step she knew,
And did it, pulling Hiram through,
Till he was puffing at her side.
Yet poor old Hiram would have died
Before he stopped and gave a chance
To some one else to take a dance
With Haly, who danced and never stopped,
'Cept with the music; then she flopped
Across the bed, like all the rest,
With Hiram, who wished she was undressed
Alone there with him in that bed,
After the infare guests had fled,
And his two waiters had tucked them in. .

“Then once again began the din
O' feet and fiddle. Haly leapt
Up from Hi's arms, and pranced and stepped
As brisk and lively as before,
While dandy one-armed Billy More
Scrapped out, with fiddle across his bow:
'*Step light, ladies, on the ball-room flo',
Don't mind your legs, if your garters don't
show,*'

Then turned to 'Turkey in the Straw.'
I reckon, stranger, you never saw
A bigger dance than was that night.
The prancing couples was a sight,

GAMBOLS ON GAYLY

For all the folks, from far and nigh,
Had come to take a night with Hi,
Who placed beside the door a gourd,
And kept it filled with licker drawed
That morning, from Dan Collins' still,
And each one helped hissself until
They was a bedlam, sure enough.
They warn't but one shied off the stuff,
And that was Widow Martin's son.

“ Now folks had never seen Rome shun
Licker before, and wondered why.
They was *some* meanness in his eye —
That much was plain. All night he stood
Like a dumb figure made o' wood,
In a dark corner, and his glare
Followed Mahaly everywhere.
Not once from her and Hi hit strayed,
And once his hand reached up and played
With something hidden on his breast —
Us folks knowed what, and kindly guessed
They might be trouble yet before
The dance was through. Then, from the door
That opened on the gallery,
We heard a yell. Who should we see,
But Hat, a pistol in each fist!

“ Now, all night we had kindly missed
Old Hat, who loved right smart to dance,
And with the liveliest gals could prance,
And wondered why she 'd stayed away.
Well, there she was, as clear as day.

GAMBOLS ON GAYLY

'T was clear that she 'd been drinking, too.
Her eyes was red, her lips was blue,
Round her flushed face, her grizzled hair
Stuck out all straggling everywhere.
Her skirts was kilted to her knees,
And her wild looks most seemed to freeze
The folks, who stood stock-still, and stared
At Hat. Hit looked like no one dared
To move. . . . She gave another yell,
Began to shoot. Folks ran like hell
Then, you can bet, right through the door.
Haly left Hi there on the floor
Yelling like mad for Hat to quit.
Before he knew what, he was hit
In the left leg. He lurched and fell,
Just as he heard another yell,
From Haly, on the creek outside.
He tried to reach her, but he tried
In vain. He knew that he was done.
He could n't even reach his gun.
When Haly yelled, and yelled again,
He started up, but groaned with pain.
Then Haly's wild cries fainter grew.
Hi felt himself grow fainter too,
And that was the very last he knew
That night.

“What had become o' Haly?

Well now, the rocks, you see, is shaly
On these here creeks. She tripped and sprawled.
That was the reason why she bawled

GAMBOLS ON GAYLY

The firstest time. But, stranger, soon
Her bawling took another tune,
When suddenly an arm went round
Her waist, and swung her from the ground,
Then flung her 'cross a horse's back
Like she had been a 'tater sack,
Or some such thing. She screamed and cried,
And beat against the horse's hide
With both her little hands and feet.
But 't warn't no use. Rome gained his seat —
For hit *was* Rome, as p'raps you guessed —
Well, maybe then you know the rest —
How Rome, he carried her away —
And *kep'* her, too. I hear folks say
They 's living happily to-day
Up yonder there on Quarrelsome.
And if a preacher-man should come,
Some day, to hold a preaching there,
Jerome and Haly both declare
They 'll have the biggest wedding ever
Been seen on forks o' Kaintuck River!"

ED CALLAHAN

“IF you’ve heard of Bloody Breathitt, and of the
Hargis clan,
That ruled it over Jackson town, you’ve heard of
Callahan —
Ed Callahan, high sheriff, who was Judge Hargis’s
man.

“And you have heard how Callahan near by here
kept a store
At Crocketsville, where his foes came, and shot him
through the door,
Then swiftly slipped away and left him writhing on
the floor.

“But, stranger, have you ever heard how Big Ed, as
he lay
In a clean cot at Buckhorn school, dying an inch
each day,
Spoke a brave word, that far was heard, and ended
the long fray?

“They bore him down to Buckhorn school, and laid
him there between
Fresh sheets in a bright sunny room, whose walls
were white and clean —

ED CALLAHAN

The prettiest place in all his life, I reckon Ed had
seen.

“ And while he lay and tossed and groaned, with an
armed guard outside,
His clansmen gathered in the hills, from Breathitt,
far and wide,
Waiting a word to start the fight, from Ed, before
he died.

“ They waited days, they waited weeks, and still no
message came
From Callahan, whose word was law, to fan the
smouldering flame.
The clansmen talked in twos and threes, and whis-
pered low his name.

“ What had become of Callahan, the leader that they
knew,
The friend of Hargis, White, and Jett, and all the
bloody crew,
That had made of Breathitt's name a shame, the
whole wide country through?

“ What had become of Callahan? So while their
watch they kept
About the fire, some waking, asked, while others
lightly slept.
Then to the gathering-place, one dawn, a boy from
Buckhorn crept.

ED CALLAHAN

“The word had come from Callahan! Swiftly the news went round.

The clansmen woke and seized their guns, beside them on the ground.

But all were silent. In that crowd there was not heard one sound.

“Then the boy spoke. He told them how, last night, before he died,

Ed Callahan had called his friends to come to his bedside,

And how, as he gasped and fought for breath, with his last breath he'd cried:

“‘Tell 'em to quit it!’ That was all. The clansmen slunk away.

Each in his home was back again by noon or night next day.

Hero of peace, Ed Callahan lies in his grave, I say.”

PRINCE O' PEACE

“So you’ve heard Uncle Ezra preach?
I reckon old Ezra still can teach
Them smart young fellers a thing or two.
There hain’t been one I ever knew
Could beat him slinging words about,
Wrastling in prayer, or lining out
A hymn for all the saved to sing,
Or washing feet, or anything.
But Ezra never was the same
Since them far days, when Prince first came.
What Prince? Prince Dillon, Prince o’ Peace!
He’s working now on the police
Up north somewhere — at Cincinnater,
Or Louisville. It does n’t matter
Just where it is. But he lived here
Both boy and man for twenty year,
’Cept when he stayed a while out west
In Oklahoma. Could n’t rest
Long, though, he said, in that big plain,
So he came drifting home again
To see the hills. But ’t warn’t no use.
Folks said that he ’d plumb cooked his goose,
And ran him off. What for? Well, son,
They’s some strange things been said and done
On this here creek within my time,
But them was the strangest. Bet a dime

PRINCE O' PEACE

You never heard how folks on Ball
Got taken in by Ezra Hall,
And by Dan Dillon's wife Maria.
They thought they was a new Messiah
Come straight to save folks on this creek.
You 've heard old Uncle Ezra speak
And make the women howl and cry.
Well, he was then ten times as spry
As he is now, to plead and roar.
Folks came from forty miles and more
In wagons, or on horse and mule,
To hear him at the old log school,
Where Hard Shells held their meetings then,
For Ez don't hold with Free Will men
That think a feller has a chance
To save his soul, 'cause he don't dance
Or drink or swear or shoot or sing,
Or with the women take his fling,
But holds all folks is saved or not
According as they draw a lot,
So does n't matter what you do.
That suited fine the feisty crew
Lived on the creek then in them days.
They was n't keen to mend their ways.
Why should they, when 't was all the same?
Some that was saved had the worst name.
I won't say Ezra was the worst,
Though he was pretty bad, and cursed,
And drank, and carried on a still.
I 've seen him drink and preach until

PRINCE O' PEACE

He could n't hardly stand no more.
Once when he toppled on the floor,
They picked him up, and heard him speak :
' Brethren, the flesh is powerful weak.'
But preachers, they has got a hide
Like common men — same things inside —
So they must have their little dram,
Same as the rest. How Ez could damn
Lost souls to hell, when he got started !
He warn't no soft-tongued, chicken-hearted,
Pale, lily-livered Methodist.
But he would bawl and shake his fist,
And clutch his beard and claw the air.
Once, when he saw old Satan there,
He shied the big Book at his head.
It hit poor Sister Sude instead,
And laid her out along the floor.
Then Ezra shouted : ' Shut the door !'
He swore the devil was in Sude.
They gave her physic, till she spewed,
And I know folks was there that say
They saw a big rat run away
Just then, and slip into a hole.
So Sude was sick, but saved her soul.

“ Now, Ezra's educated, too,
And he's plumb read the Scriptures through
From Genesis to Revelations,
He'll show you plain, how all the nations
Is working out along God's plan —
What are the ways he's mapped for man,

PRINCE O' PEACE

And why hit hain't no use to try
To clamber up into the sky
Without the call that folks must wait.
And he can tell a body straight
If strange dreams mean his soul is sure,
Or sent by Satan as a lure
To git a sinner safe inside —
A trick the Sarpint's often tried.
But you cain't fool old Ezra none.
I reckon he 's spoiled a heap o' fun
For the old Boy on this here fork.

“But, son, you 're tired o' hearing me talk
O' Ezra, and you want to know
'Bout Prince o' Peace. Well, happened so,
Must have been back nigh forty year,
Ez began talking kindly queer,
'Bout things was going to happen soon.
Folks would have thought he was a loon
If they 'd not known ole Ezra well.
So when he started in to tell
How he had larned he was appointed
To lead the way for the Anointed,
Like John the Baptist come again,
He got a lot o' Christian men
And women round him on the creek.
And then one day they heard him speak
The strangest words was ever heard.
He said he saw a snow-white bird
A-circling there above his head.
That was the Holy Ghost, he said,

PRINCE O' PEACE

And soon they 'd see the Blessed Son
Right there among them. Everyone
Jumped-like at that. But Dillon's wife,
Maria, might have felt a knife,
So high she jumped, so loud she cried.
She fetched her hand to her left side,
Like she had had a sudden pain,
Then started jumping might and main
Once more, and shouted big and loud —
Something about a soft white cloud
That seemed to muffle her around.
Sudden she fell flat on the ground,
Like she was dead. 'T was near her time.
Next day she gave birth to a prime
Big boy. When she could speak,
She swore, her voice low-like and weak,
No earthly father got the brat.
Dan Dillon kindly grinned at that.
But no one took much stock in Dan,
For he was a durned Republican.
What's more, he 'd never joined the church,
So folks just kindly let him perch
Out on the bars, and chew his quid,
While they piled in to see the kid,
And the kid's maw. 'Tween you and me,
They war n't such a hell o' a lot to see.
Two kids is like as two dried peas.
But old Aunt Sal flopped on her knees,
And fell to singing hymns o' praise.
Then the thing broke out like a blaze

PRINCE O' PEACE

Once it gits started in the cane.
They shouted: 'The lamb has come again!'
And started kissing and embracing.
And all the time folks came a-racing
From up the creek, till they was more
Than could find places on the floor.
And a big crowd got jammed outside,
Like logs in the creek, when they 's a tide.
It seemed to git bigger every minute —
Must have been nigh a hundred in it,
When preacher Ez came riding up.
'T was plain he must have had a sup
Or two. He was a bit unsteady,
But half a dozen hands was ready
To help him off his horse and through
The crowd. Then he was lost to view
Inside the house. But soon he bore
The kid out through the open door,
And took his place, where all could see,
Under a flowering locust tree.
'T was powerful hard for him to stand.
He gave a lurch, then raised his hand.
 " 'Brethren,' he cried, 'the Word has spoke.
The Golden Candlestick was broke,
But now God rears it up anew
To be a sign to me and you,
That Holy Scriptures is fulfilled.
Hit looks to me like He has willed
To build His Kingdom on this creek.
You folks all heard the Spirit speak,

PRINCE O' PEACE

And now you see this Kid is sent
To be for us an Ornament.
We don't deserve him none, nohow.
We hain't done much but drink and row,
But now our meanness' got to cease.
'T won't do to have the Prince o' Peace
Grow up in such a feisty crew
Like we've been here, both me and
you.

For I've been bad as all the rest.
Got licker underneath my vest
This minute, but I'm going to quit.'
He took a bottle out and hit
It on a rock so hard it broke.
Then all the other brethren spoke
And 'lowed that they would foller suit.'
One drew a gun out of his boot,
And threw the thing upon the ground.
One minute, and there was a mound
O' weapons there, and bottles, too.
I could n't half believe 't was true,
And swore such doings could n't last.
But, friend, the months began to pass,
And not a single one backslid.
Some may have, but they kept it hid.
And such a place you never saw
As this creek then. Folks kept the law,
And spent their time in song and prayer,
Or they would stand around and stare
At that strange kid. Dan did n't dare

PRINCE O' PEACE

To say a word — just grinned and whittled.
The neighbors kept Maria vittled.
So Dan, who allus *was* a shirk,
Sort o' set back, and would n't work.
Why should he, when they was enough
O' greasy beans and other stuff,
For him to have his pickings too?

“ Well, time went on, and soon months grew
To years. It seemed 't was Kingdom Come.
Something had struck the Devil dumb
And kept him safe down there below.
Meantime the kid began to grow.
He was a frisky little chap, —
Even when on his mammy's lap,
Would beat her breast, and make a fuss.
At two he started in to cuss
As smart as other kids at four;
And when he could toddle on the floor,
One day he grabbed and killed a cat.
Folks kindly shook their heads at that.
'T warn't hardly like the Prince o' Peace. . . .
Soon he was chasing hens and geese
With sticks and stones, and he could fling
And hit an eagle on the wing.
I saw him once. When he was six,
He was a reg'lar bag o' tricks.
There was n't much he could n't do.
At seven he larned to drink and chew,
To shoot and scrap and use a knife.
He stole one from a neighbor's wife,

PRINCE O' PEACE

Took it to school, and stuck a kid,
Who would n't do what he was bid.
For Prince was bound to have his way,
And he was *bad*. Stranger, one day
That infant took a franzy spell,
And started in, like bloody hell,
To clear the schoolroom. 'T was a sight,
They say, to see him kick and bite.
He made the teacher look a fool.
When he was eight, he burned the school,
And stole his paw's best gun, and swore
He did n't aim to larn no more.
At nine he looted Perkins' mill
And stole the stuff to make a still.
The sheriff had to nab him then.
They clapped him into jail at ten.
He did n't seem to mind a bit.
In fact, he rather favored it.
For he could sit and pick and sing
All day, 'thout doing anything
But eat and sleep, till he was tired,
Then got him things somehow, and fired
The jail, one night, and slipped away.
All winter in the hills he lay,
And built him there a little shack.
That spring, the sheriff brung him back.
They 'd built a new jail to put him in,
But 't would n't hold that child o' sin —
For most folks now, they plainly saw
That if Prince had no earthly paw,

PRINCE O' PEACE

Hit was the *Devil* fathered him!

“ So things went on, and as the limb
Grew worse, the faithful fell off fast.
Old Uncle Ezra was the last
To own he 'd made a big mistake.
Yet something came at last to shake
Even him. When Prince was most a man,
He formed a kind o' Ku Klux Klan
With no-'count boys he 'd led astray.
They hid up in the hills all day,
But rode for miles around at night,
Burned barns, gave godly folks a fright.
And, stranger, them things warn't the worst.
They warn't a decent girl that durst
After 't was dark, put out her head.
They lay and shivered there in bed,
When they heard Prince's band ride by
The house, like hell, with whoop and cry.

“ But they was one was kindly wild,
Like Prince. She warn't much more 'n a child,
Yet she was most a woman grown,
And had a temper of her own,
That made the fellers most afraid.
So Prince, he vowed he 'd have the maid,
And went to take her, while 't was light.
He found her . . . She tried hard to fight.
She kicked, she bit, she tore his hair.
Her brothers tried to force the pair
Apart, but Prince, he had his men.
By God, he tamed her there and then! . . .

PRINCE O' PEACE

And she, she loved him from that day.
One night he spirited her away,
And afterwards she 'd always go,
Dressed in boys' clothes, like Jackaro,
Riding with him and his wild clan.
She liked to think she was a man.
She *was* one pretty nigh, and yet,
A woman may sometimes forget
She *is* a woman, for a spell,
Then something happens . . .

Stranger, well,

I don't know as I need to tell
You what it was reminded Nance
That something more than coat and pants
Is needed to turn gals to boys.
One night she fainted from the noise
The fellers made, who drank and sang.
Next day the whole darned country rang
With word that Nance had had a son.
Folks knew that Prince must be the one.
But then 't was clear he was a man,
Like all the rest. The story ran
From house to house, with lightning speed,
That Prince was not the Devil's breed,
More than Jehovah's. When folks knew
That much, they knew what else to do.
They met that night at Perkins' store,
Went up, and battered down the door
O' Prince's shack. They found him there
Alone with Nance. They took the pair —

PRINCE O' PEACE

They let the hussy keep her kid —
And set them both upon a skid,
Then slid them down the timber slide.
You bet that Prince took on and cried.
But 't warn't no use. His hands was tied.
So was his feet. They had him fast.
And when they got them down at last,
They covered Prince with boiling tar,
And rode him round upon a bar,
Till he could n't hardly ride no more,
Then threwed them both upon the floor
Of a jolt wagon, bound them down,
And drove them off to Jackson town,
Bought tickets, put them on the train. . . .

“ I said that Prince came back again
One year, but folks had not forgot,
And made things so all-fired hot,
That he was glad to git away.
He hain't been back here since that day,
And wont, I reckon, for a spell . . .
Folks git along now pretty well
Without no princes from above.
And Uncle Ezra preaches love —
'Cept for the Soft Shells — does n't seek
To build no Kingdom on this creek,
No more, but kindly lets things go
Like they's *intended*, here below.”

MEN OF HARLAN

Some folks said you fellers was Harlanites when you come riding into the settlement. But I allowed you did n't favor men o' Harlan.

HERE in the level country, where the creeks run
straight and wide,

Six men upon their pacing nags may travel side by
side.

But the mountain men of Harlan, you may tell them
all the while,

When they pass through our village, for they ride
in single file.

And the children, when they see them, stop their
play and stand and cry :

“ Here come the men of Harlan, men of Harlan,
riding by.”

O the mountain men of Harlan, when they come
down to the plain,

With dangling stirrup, jangling spur, and loosely
hanging rein,

They do not ride, like our folks here, in twos and
threes abreast,

With merry laughter, talk and song, and lightly
spoken jest.

But silently and solemnly, in long and straggling line,
As you may see them in the hills, beyond Big Black
and Pine.

MEN OF HARLAN

For, in that far, strange country, where the men of
Harlan dwell,

There are no roads at all, like ours, as we 've heard
travelers tell.

But only narrow trails that wind along each shallow
creek,

Where the silence hangs so heavy, you can hear the
leathers squeak.

And there no two can ride abreast, but each alone
must go,

Picking his way as best he may, with careful steps
and slow,

Down many a shelving ledge of shale, skirting the
trembling sands,

Through many a pool and many a pass, where the
mountain laurel stands

So thick and close to left and right, with holly
bushes, too,

The clinging branches meet midway to bar the pas-
sage through, —

O'er many a steep and stony ridge, o'er many a
high divide.

And so it is the Harlan men thus one by one do
ride.

Yet it is strange to see them pass in line through
our wide street,

When they come down to sell their sang, and buy
their stores of meat,

MEN OF HARLAN

These silent men, in sombre black all clad from foot
to head,

Though they have left their lonely hills and the
narrow creek's rough bed.

And 't is no wonder children stop their play and
stand and cry:

“Here come the men of Harlan, men of Harlan,
riding by.”

THE NEW LIFE

I

THE soft coal splutters in the grate,
The shadows lengthen. It grows late,
And from the low bed where he lies,
His wandering, incurious eyes
Can scarcely see the oaken loom
That fills one end of the big room
From whose dim rafters vaguely hang
Bunches of onions, roots of sang,
Strings of dried shuckies, ears of corn,
Sunbonnets, clothes, a powder-horn —
A medley of strange mountain things.
From a rude peg a lanthorn swings,
While, on the fireboard, fastened high,
An old hog-rifle meets his eye,
Above a home-made dulcimore.
A sound comes to him through the door
Half-opened on the village street —
A sound of clumsy, shuffling feet,
Loud, boyish shouts. There! Shots again —
More shots — the bullets fall like rain
Upon the sloping cabin roof.
It's odd, his nerves seem never proof
Against their sharp, swift, pattering noise.
And yet, for weeks, he's heard these boys

THE NEW LIFE

Go "battering" daily down the creek.
Not so odd, though, for he is weak
From the long fever. That is gone,
Thank God, at last; but wan and worn
He lies there, like a ship in port,
That wind and waves have made their sport,
Till scarcely a shred of canvas clings
To her dismantled hamperings,
And her stout sides are shaken, scarred . . .
Something within him struggles hard
To shape itself. But his dull mind
That gropes and gropes, can never find
The thing it seeks, and soon gives o'er
The effort. Yet dream pictures pour
Beneath his lids when, half asleep,
And tired of counting countless sheep,
He lets his errant fancy rove.
How long, before he reached this cove,
He wandered, still he cannot tell.
Yet some things he remembers well —
That time he stumbled half the night
Up the blind branch, without a light,
Till, rousing a cabin with his din,
He made them wake and let him in.
And then that time he crossed Big Black,
Toting a heavy horse's pack,
Because he found no horse or mule
In all that country. What a fool
He'd been so long to cling and cling
To blankets and that rubber thing

THE NEW LIFE

He'd never used! Next time he'd bring
A rucksack, stout shoes for his feet.
How they had hurt! And then the heat
Of those walled creeks! No breath of air,
The warm branch water everywhere.
Water! 'T was that, no doubt, had made
Him sick. How he had prayed and prayed
When first he knew that he must lie
For weeks in bed, that he might die
Here, half untended, all alone,
Where even his name would be unknown,
And have his grave on the hillside!
Why was it, though, he'd wished to hide
In death, no less than life? The screen
Still seemed to cut across the scene
Of his dim past, and something made
Him half reluctant, half afraid
To find what spectre lurked behind
That curtained corner of his mind.

The mountain people had proved kind
Beyond all hoping. They had said
Few words, but tended him in bed,
With clumsy service, touching thought.
One woman butter-milk had brought
Each day, though she had but one cow.
'T was all the doctor would allow
For food, long as the fever lasted.
No wonder he was thin and wasted,
That he could feel each rib and shin.
He raised his hand to touch his chin,

THE NEW LIFE

And found a beard he did not know.
He 'd hardly thought that it could grow
So long in just six weeks. If she,
Doris, at home, could only see —
Doris! Then swiftly, at that name,
The whole blank past back flooding came.
He knew once more the searing shame
Of those long years of servitude,
When he had followed every mood
Of a vain woman, every whim,
Though all the while she 'd sneered at him
In secret, held him up to scorn.
To keep him, jesting, she had sworn,
And so, for years, had lightly played
With his deep love. But she had "made
Him" — "made!" because to win her love,
He 'd put dull drudgery above
All else in life! She wanted gold.
Well, she should have it, and he 'd sold
Himself for dross. And when he 'd won
Some useless wealth, his life was done.
Then he had craved oblivion —
To lose himself in some far wild.
He 'd heard, when he was but a child,
How, in the South, a grim wall stands,
"Twixt east and west, the Cumberlands,
Built up of ridges, fold on fold,
And how their steep escarpments hold
Deep winding valleys lost between
Sheer sombre hillsides clad with green

THE NEW LIFE

Oak forests, or with waving corn.
For, in those valleys, men were born,
Lived, loved, and died, and never saw
The world beyond. They knew no law
Save their wild will, and he had read
Of fierce feud fights, of hot blood
shed

Like water, on each fork and creek.
And once he 'd heard a traveler speak
Of rough log cabins, the abodes
Of those rude clansmen, and their roads
That were the beds of shallow streams
Over shale ledges. In his dreams
He 'd often visited this land.
And once, while still a boy he 'd planned
To get a horse and ride straight through
That strange lost country, till he knew
Each nook and corner. But there came
No time work did not wholly claim,
Till now — now, when the very thought
Of solitude a solace brought.
So he had come here.

It was June,
When the full creeks still sang in tune,
That summer heat too soon would dry,
And each green ridge, against the sky,
Melted away in tender mist
Of azure and of amethyst.
Never would he forget the sight
Of spur on spur, bathed in soft light,

THE NEW LIFE

That afternoon, ere he descended
From the first gap, and saw all blended
In a translucent atmosphere.
And then the silence! Surely here
He must find peace. And yet, he knew,
As he dropped down, and lost the view,
That, just as the hills closed in behind,
So the dark bosom of his mind
Soon would engulf him as before.
And when he 'd reached the flat creek floor,
And saw the towering creek walls rise
Above him, shutting out the skies,
While the rough trail wound on ahead,
He knew all hope of peace had fled,
And he must henceforth spend his days
Lost in a labyrinthine maze
Of tortuous thought and vain regret.
Yet something had thrilled him, when he met
His first lone horseman on the creek.
They had drawn rein and stopped to speak,
Two travelers in another age.
History had turned back her page,
As if all times to her were one.
Then he had come, at set of sun,
To his first cabin, where it stood
In a rough clearing, ringed with wood —
A magic circle on the ground.
And he had heard the cheerful sound
Of chopping — the summons to "alight."
He had got down and spent the night

THE NEW LIFE

With a whole horde, in one big bed.
So, day by day, the time had sped,
And night by night, but all in vain.
No wandering had eased his pain.
Then, at the last, his horse had died,
And he, from creek to creek, had tried
To get another. Stock was rare
In that corn-planting time. Nowhere
He 'd found a nag that he could buy,
And soon he 'd even ceased to try.
For, though he 'd found it hard, at first,
To struggle on, half sick with thirst,
And with the streaming sweat half blind,
The heavy strain had dulled his mind,
But weakened, no doubt, his body too,
Letting the "mountain fever" through.
So, crossing the Pine by Baldy's Crown,
He 'd come, at last, to this poor "town,"
The hillfolk called the village where
Cabins clung round a courthouse square,
With a brick "storehouse" and a jail.
Here he had felt his last strength fail.
The world around had slipped away.
And never yet, until to-day,
He 'd got it back firm in his hands.
But now again the iron bands
Of his past life regained their hold
Upon his heart. The room grew cold.
A woman came and stirred the fire.
Then, as the spluttering flames leapt higher,

THE NEW LIFE

The welcome warmth through his limbs crept.
Once more the world slipped, and he slept.

II

Slowly the gray dawn drove the gloom
Out of the corners of the room,
Where every corner held a bed.
He lay and watched each pillowed head
Turn to the world awakening eyes.
Then, one by one, saw gaunt forms rise,
Through the dim shadows slip away.
Soon from the covers, where he lay,
He heard the house awake once more.
One came, unbarred the heavy door
On the dog-run, and flung it wide.
There was a stir of life outside,
As men and women came and went,
Each on some morning labor bent,
To start the fire, to feed the stock.
The ax fell dully on the block.
How often he had heard each sound !
How well he knew the daily round
Of life here, where the fates had cast
His lot ! It seemed that years had passed,
Not weeks, since he 'd first lain and heard
That bowl of corn meal being stirred,
That thud of butter in the churn. . . .
Slowly his thoughts began to turn
Back to the past that would not die.
So, through long days, he yet must lie,

THE NEW LIFE

And think, and brood, and ache, and then
Must he seek out the world again,
Take up some burden? What? For whom?
A ray of sunlight reached the room,
And, through the window, he could see
The golden gourd-hung gallery.
It seemed to him that, at the view,
Something within him stirred anew.
It was not hope. His life was done.
But just to sit there in the sun
Might bring him peace. For it was less
Pain he now knew, than weariness,
From lying these long weeks in bed.
He tried to turn and raise his head
To see still more — perhaps the creek.
But he was still too worn and weak,
Sank back exhausted, with a sigh.

But now, as day by day passed by,
Slowly he felt his strength return,
And more and more he came to yearn
For the warm sunlight there outside.
Restless he listened for the stride
Of the rough doctor, who had brought,
Jesting, one day, for him a quart
Of mountain "moonshine," for a "sup."
And then, at last, they let him up,
Helped him to dress, and placed a chair
Beside the open window where
He could look out. He never knew
That creek and sky could be so blue,

THE NEW LIFE

That mountain-sides could be so green.
Yet it was fall now, and between
The pines, the oaks were turning fast.
The woods would now be filled with mast,
And once again he longed to ride
Along the ridge, or by the side
Of some broad, shallow, brawling creek,
But knew he still would be too weak
For many a day to ride or walk.
He was content to sit and talk
With friendly folk who shyly bore
Gifts from their slender mountain store—
Canned fruit, cushaw, and “sarvice” berry,
Crab apple tinctured with wild cherry;
He tasted, liked the bitter tang.
Boys brought their banjos, picked and sang.
The town’s best fiddler came and played.
And then, one day, a little maid
Came too, and sang a ballad tune
She said she’d heard her mother croon
Beside her bed, when she was small.
Already she was growing tall,
Though she had only turned sixteen.
He thought that he had never seen
Such grace in any woman’s form,
As in this child’s. Her hue was warm,
As if it held a shade of gold.
And through her scanty garment’s fold,
He saw her body’s firm, straight line.
Her shimmering hair, spun silken fine,

THE NEW LIFE

Drawn back in a loose knot below
Her slender neck, let blue veins show
About her temples. He could see
The delicate white witchery
Of amber-shadowed neck and ear,
It seemed to him that he could hear
Beneath her skin, the swift blood speak.
The long curved lashes brushed her cheek,
When she would lower her gray eyes.
He watched the fair young bosom rise
And fall, as her soft breath came and went
She sang, as if she were intent
Only on that old song, could see
Scenes stirred by the magic melody
Fair Margaret lying stark and dead,
Her ghost that sought Sweet William's bed,
Then both the twain undone by love,
And roses and briars that sprang above
Their graves, until they met and twined.
Ceasing, she went, but held his mind
Long from his brooding thoughts. He smiled
To think how, at his age, a child
Could hold his fancy. Half a fear
Sprang in him, as the hour drew near
When she had said she 'd come again
Next day, and sing for him. But then,
Once more to see her sitting there,
Straight in the stiff white oak split chair,
Drove every lingering thought away . . .

So she returned to him each day,

THE NEW LIFE

And sang or charmed him with her talk,
And when, at last, he tried to walk,
She walked with him, and helped to guide
His steps. He felt her at his side,
And felt her fingers on his arm.
Again he knew that vague alarm,
But this time put it bruesquely by.
She was a child, and he would try,
While they passed slowly up the creek,
To draw her out, to make her speak
Of her life here, in this lost place.
He listened and he watched her face,
While she ran on. Her "paw" was dead —
Killed in a fierce feud fight, she said —
Both brothers from the hills had gone.
She and her "maw" were left alone
To keep and run the little farm.
They had not come to any harm,
And she was proud that she could go,
With any man, along the row.
She showed her arm, and made him feel
The muscles firm and strong as steel
Under the rippling satin skin.
And she could cook and she could spin —
Had found some time for school, as well,
Could read and write and add and spell.
And she — well he had *heard* her sing.
She liked that best of anything,
Knew of old ballet-songs a score —
Could even pick the dulcimore.

THE NEW LIFE

And so, while running on, one day,
She, half-unconscious, led the way
To their small cabin, in a cove.
It stood amid a little grove
Of feathery locusts, now half bare,
And some gnarled apple-trees were there,
With ripe red apples hanging high.
A row of bee-gums met his eye.
He thought that he had never seen
A mountain home so neat and clean,
When he had followed through the
door.

Spotless and white the cabin floor
Shone, like the walls with paper hung.
Over the fire a kettle swung,
And gleaming coppers in a row
Gave back an iridescent glow.
A coverlet of indigo
Or madder, covered every bed.
He heard a step, and turned his head,
To see her mother, where she stood,
Half shy. Her arms were full of wood
She'd gathered for the evening meal.
He thought he saw her brown eyes steal
Towards Mally. Then she quaintly bowed,
Said that they would both be right proud
If he would stop and "take a night."
But he, who saw the waning light,
Said, half-abruptly, he must go.
What held him back, he did not know.

THE NEW LIFE

But, from that hour, that girlish grace,
That eager, vivid, dreaming face
Haunted his dreams. He could not stay
From that bright cabin home a day.
His footsteps ever found the way
Up the blind branch to Mally's cove.
He did not know that it was love
That brought him back. He did not guess
The secret of the happiness
He felt when he was with them there.
He only knew that every care
Had slipped away. He 'd found the peace,
The troubled spirit's sweet release,
That he had come so far to seek.
The warning voice had ceased to speak,
As still they wandered up the creek,
Now all on fire with tawny sedge,
Or clambered up a crumbling ledge.
He quite forgot that he was old,
When, seizing his hand, she sought to
scold
Him for his flight ahead too fast.
And so the fading autumn passed.
The season soon to winter turned,
But still the ruddy oak-leaves burned
Like beacons. After the first snow,
They went for holly, mistletoe,
To make the little cabin gay.
Once, when he kissed her, half in play,
An instant in his arms she lay,

THE NEW LIFE

Then, like a wild thing, turned and fled. . . .
Next day he saw her eyes were red,
But she looked up at him and smiled.
Never had she seemed more a child,
But from that time he felt a shade
Come over her, even when they played ;
And often, on their walks, he thought
She seemed more silent and distraught
Than she had been, and wondered why.
Then one day, when they 'd wandered high
Through the beech woods, they heard a noise,
And half a dozen village boys
Broke out upon them through the brush.
One spoke to her. He saw her blush,
And when he went for her next day,
He saw the same boy slip away
Like a dark shade, through the dim wood.
Then, in a flash, he understood . . .
One moment he stood there, stricken, still,
Till, summoning his shattered will,
He hurried down the branch again.
His heart was yet too numb for pain,
But through the dull daze of his mind,
He knew that he had left behind
All that he loved, that he was lost,
Yet must go now at any cost —
Never again must see her face.
It haunted him in every place
He passed, as he went stumbling back,
Along the creek. He 'd take his pack

THE NEW LIFE

Next day, as soon as it was light,
And steal away. All that long night
He lay and listened to his heart.
How could he tell that love would start
There once again, when love seemed dead?
Now he must go, and she would wed
Her mountain boy. But he was glad
She would be happy, hoped the lad
Would treat her well. He could not bear
To think that any sordid care
Should tame that spirit, dull that eye.
Yet he could see the years pass by
Taking their toll. It made him writhe
To think that she, so supple, lithe,
Should lose her free, proud poise some day,
Yet knew it was the mountain way,
With women, worn by heavy toil,
Chained down like chattels to the soil.
If only he — he stopped there short.
Not even once must that mad thought
Lodge for a moment in his mind.
His life, he knew, lay all behind,
Hers lay before her, all ahead.
Better for her that he were dead,
Than such a thing had come to pass.
He saw his forty years amass
A fatal barrier between
Their lives. His only dream had been
To go on living by her side.
Perhaps, in time, he might have tried

THE NEW LIFE

To teach her, train her, though afraid
To touch her, whom the hills had made
So perfect in her own wild way.
He might have helped her, though. A day
Came back to him, when he had planned
How he could add land to their land,
Build a new house, with barns, buy stock —
Some year-old heifers, and a flock
Of sheep — raise cover crops for corn.
He dreamt that he perhaps was born
To show these mountaineers new ways
To win back wealth. New herds would graze
On these great ridges, now worn bare.
New life would spring up everywhere.
It would be something to redeem
A race. Yet all that was a dream ;
And when the dawn began to break,
He rose to dress and wash and take
His pack, and start away once more.
He stood a moment in the door,
To see the creek walls white with hoar.
He knew this sight would be his last,
And with a heavy heart he passed
Down the still sleeping village street,
Hoping he might not chance to meet
Some friend, so hurried on, and soon
Had left the town. A wisp of moon
Swam in the rose above the ridge.
He passed the flimsy swinging bridge
That marked the last cabin on the creek.

THE NEW LIFE

Beyond, lay all the world to seek
Another new, remote abode.
Then there, before him, in the road,
Sprang up a figure that he knew.
Mally! With outstretched arms she flew
Straight towards him, round his neck she flung
Them wildly, and her cold lips clung
To his, in one long desperate kiss.
“How could you go away like this?”
She cried. Sobs swayed her like a storm
That shakes some slender birch. Her form
Quivered and shook in his embrace.
Tears made a mist upon her face,
In the loose tangle of her hair.
He saw that her brown feet were bare.
Cut by the frozen earth, they bled.
She must have come there straight from bed, . . .
She dreamt she'd seen him in this place . . .
An ice-fringed rock-house showed a space
Where they could sit, and he could hold
Her close in his arms, till no more cold.
Then, lightly lifting her, he bore
Her back up the branch to her own door,
And laid her down on her own bed.
There, as she reached, and drew his head
To hers, he knelt beside the child;
And as they kissed again, he smiled
That he'd once thought his life was done,
When it had only just begun!

AT PARTING

SHE said: "Dear love, ah, well I know
I cannot keep thee, thou must go
Back from me to the world of men.

Nor are we like to meet again.

And yet, because even so, 't was sweet
To chain one day thy wandering feet,

Henceforth, wherever I may be,

I shall prepare a room for thee,

And it shall be thy parsonage."

She smiled, looked down, and turned a page
In the big book that by her lay.

Once more: "Do you recall the day,

Months back — you had just come," she said,

"When you and I together read

The story of the Shunammite,

Who, seeing Elisha day and night,

And who, as love within her woke,

With craft to her blind husband spoke:

'Let us a chamber make, I pray,

For this good man who goes his way,

Which is God's way, in sight of all.

Come, let us build it on the wall,

And let us place therein a bed,

That he may stay to rest his head,

When tired; a table for his bread;

AT PARTING

A candlestick to give him light ;
A little stool. He may requite
Some day our kindness. Who can tell ?
Ah, she did love her prophet well,
As I 've loved you, and since our child — ”
She paused once more, looked down, and smiled —
“ Will never know his father's fame,
I 'll call him by Elisha's name.”

THE END

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